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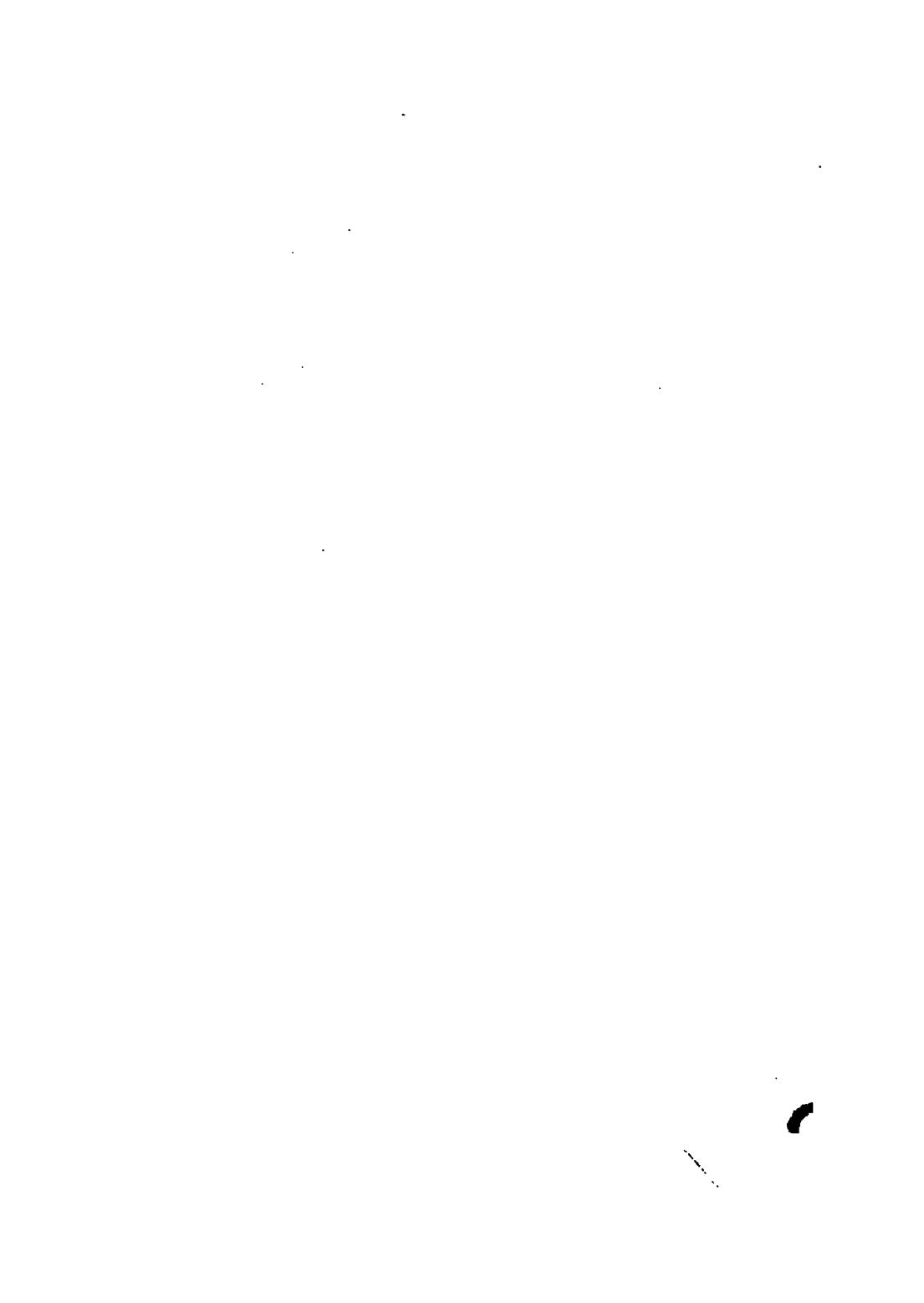


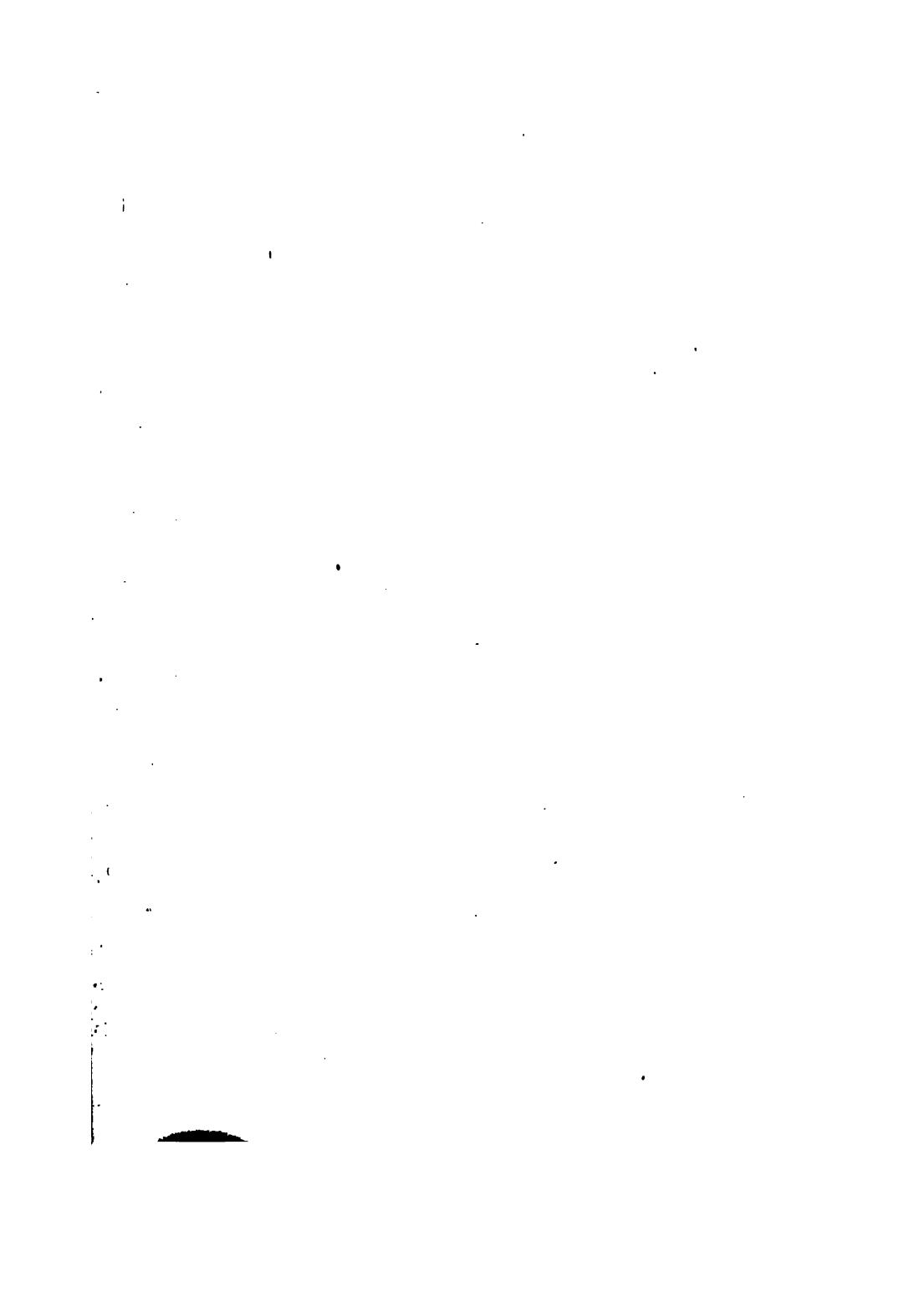
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Maxwell Struthers Burt







**JOHN O'MAY
AND OTHER STORIES**

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AND OTHER STORIES



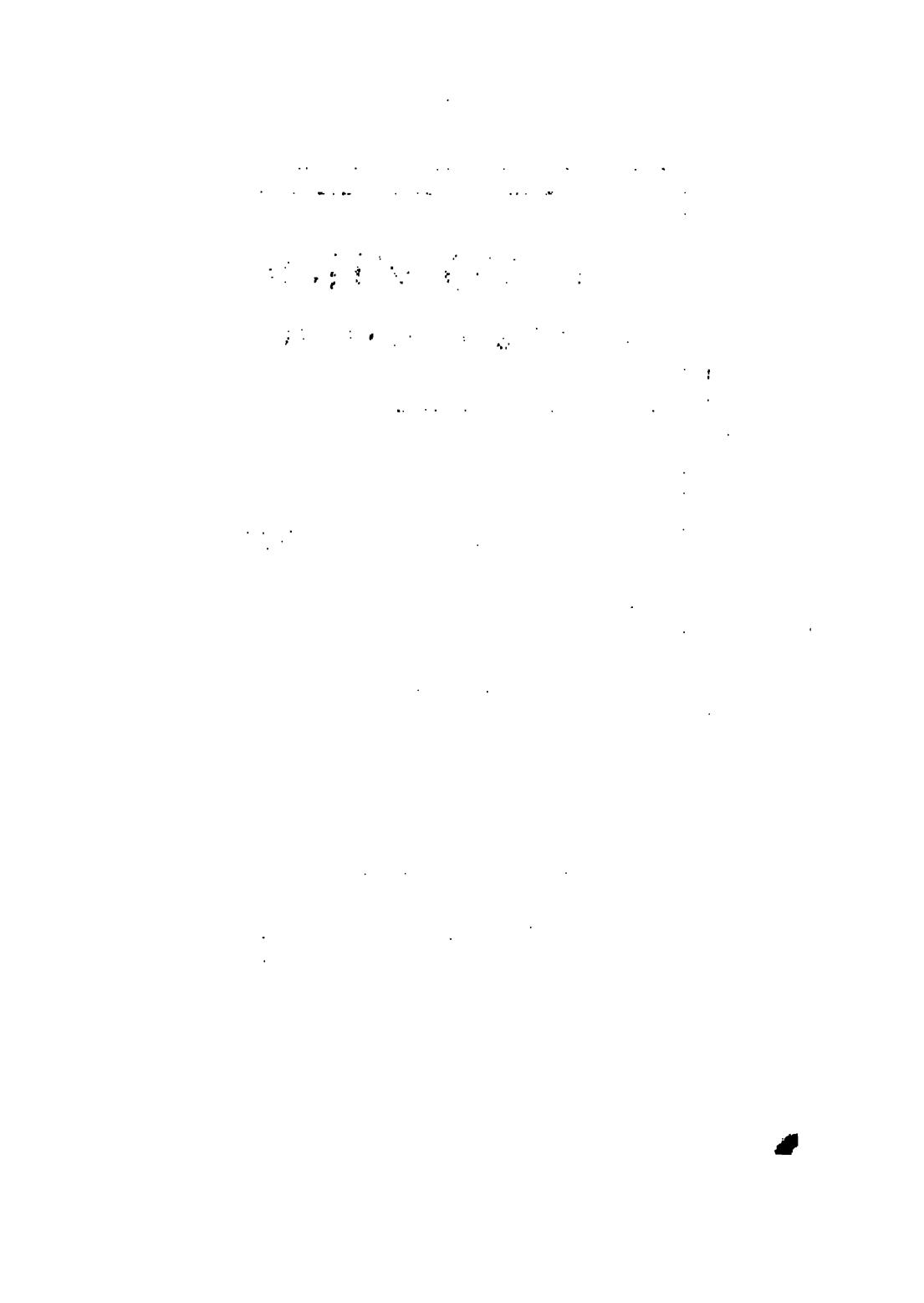
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They talked of many things—he and the governor-general.
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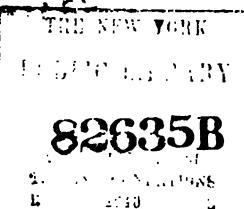
**JOHN O'MAY
AND OTHER STORIES**

BY
MAXWELL STRUTHERS BURT

ILLUSTRATED

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
NEW YORK ::::::::::::::: 1918

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JOHN O'MAY



JOHN O'MAY

ADVENTURE, mental or physical, is met with unexpectedly. There was a dinner at Tommy Dunstan's and I had driven five miles across country. I was late, and I came in out of the semi-darkness of an April night—a little crescent moon cutting a thin band of white in a pale-green sky—to find the others already at table. They were mostly people I knew, neighbors of Tommy and myself: nice people; fox-hunters, most of them; solid young people with money back of them; tall, slim, delightfully healthy; the women with the iridescent, small-headed, not very mellow loveliness of American women—lilies without perfume. Then I noticed O'May.

He struck me at once as alien and arresting. There was exotic coloring: a brown of sunburn, a vivid black of hair, a heather-gray of eyes. Despite the half of him hidden by the table-cloth, one received an impression of slim-waistedness, of broad but distinctly well-bred shoulders, of clothes worn with the careless assurance of perfection that seems to be one of the few traits actually inherited. And there was as well, from

John O'May

the way in which he bent toward the woman to whom he was talking, that curious suggestion of masculinity more common in Europeans than in Americans; a suggestion of—how shall I put it? —of humorous acquiescence in a tradition observed but seen through completely. . . . I wondered who the man was. My neighbors wondered too.

When dinner was over Dunstan called out to me. "Billy," he said, "come here. I want you to meet Captain O'May. Captain John O'May." Captain John O'May! A name like an Irish day in April, isn't it? "Ex-Tenth Hussars"—Dunstan has the explanatory manner—"ex-Boer War, ex-coca-planter, ex-everything, aren't you, Jack?"

"Ex-everything," returned the gentleman in question, with just the faintest hint of a brogue, "ex-everything, except exacting." Then he laughed, showing very white, even teeth under a short mustache, and put out his hand.

I felt immediately the tang to him.

Captain O'May sat down; he poured himself a liqueur; he pushed the bottle toward me; I found myself listening with a bewildering suddenness to a preposterous story of baboons. I have no idea how baboons came to be mentioned; I don't believe they were mentioned; but I was swept up in



John O'May

the tale. It seems in South Africa they march in regiments, the males first, the females with their babies following. In front goes a gray-bearded creature, portentous and not to be laughed at. When they come to a river the leaders plunge in and, taking hands, form a line over which the wives and children go. There is much screaming and refusal. The pantaloon general cuffs the obstreperous. It is a curious sight in the great moonlight—the hairy shapes, the precision and gravity of it. All the while they swing their arms and make a hoarse marching chorus—“Rum-pah! Rum-pah!” Something like that. . . . I didn’t know whether to believe what I was hearing or not; but I had a distinct vision—of sands and a river like slow quicksilver, of a night wide as unknown seas, and of outlandish processions. My mind was entirely removed from an American suburb to countries lying on the outer edge of a planet which, if only you could see it in perspective, would seem a witch-like globe phosphorescent with romance. . . . After that I saw O’May no more for a month.

When I did see him again it was again at Dunstan’s, and instantly I felt the little thrill you feel when subconsciously you have been desiring the renewal of an acquaintanceship. I asked

John O'May

him over to my place for the night. He came and spent six days—borrowing my collars and shirts with a calmness that gave to that irritating act a perpetual dignity. A dinner-jacket of mine fitted him perfectly. I imagine that every one's clothes fitted O'May.

And so, in the curiously casual manner he had, he fell into the habit of Dunstan and myself.

All that summer and autumn and winter he would appear without warning, stay a week or two, and disappear as quietly as he had come. I liked him about; I liked his feline walk; I liked his attitude of quiescent readiness. He was so immediately willing to do anything, but at the same time so little weary of doing nothing at all. One seldom meets a man who combines stoicism with eagerness. O'May lay in wait for life. I spoke of him to my friends as "a silent Irishman"; I was not a little proud that I had discovered him. I had forgotten the baboon story, you see, or, if I thought of it at all, put it down to the conversational eagerness that follows an introduction. After three months I found, quite unexpectedly, that baboons, allegorically speaking, were poignantly characteristic of O'May.

He sucked his pipe; he looked at the fire, and

John O'May

then at the clock which had just struck ten; he sipped his whiskey and burst into a passion of epic narration. I was utterly unprepared. Behind the rigid mask of a British ex-soldier I saw—what I should have suspected long before—peeping out—leering out, rather—the unkillable Celt. I was delighted and astonished. Here was tang added to tang.

And O'May did not let the salt evaporate. Before strangers he was a trifle shy,—not incurably, a little persuasion would as a rule produce the desired results,—but he preferred evenings alone with me. An open fire, a bottle of King William, some tobacco handy, were all the scenery needed for extraordinary feats of mental conjuring. It was as if, having taken my measure and found me an amenable victim, he had decided to exercise upon me to their limit the very great powers of his imagination. And the interesting part was that one never knew when he was telling the truth and when he was not. I doubt if he knew himself.

What was back of it all baffled me. I often wondered. Possibly it was the chromatic Gael, educated almost entirely by a reckless, hard-bitten world. In a happier age O'May would have sung to a harp. But this much must be said, as

John O'May

I have said before—the total effect was magnificent. Through all the tropic dusk and welter of incredible incident adventure glowed like a monstrous firefly.

He took me to Trinidad, where he had gorgeously failed at coca-planting; he took me to Ireland, where, apparently, he had been born rather carelessly into an aristocratic but typically Hibernian family; to Africa, where he had fought, and to India, where, as a young subaltern, he had served; and every time he took me he took me differently, nor did I ever recognize again any one met before. Life blossomed exotically. It became alchemic. One had a confused impression of coincidence and paradox.

There had been a little sister of his when first he had gone out to India, a little sister he remembered as a wee bit slip of a thing with big blue eyes and yellow curls. A sunbeam she was in the shadows of an old, badly kept park—and then, apparently, he had forgotten all about her. You conjectured the O'Mays were an enormous family. Years later came a small tribal war up in the hills, and the regiment was ordered there, and with it a young chap just out from England. O'May hardly knew him, but found him as a tent-mate. A nice young fellow he was, son of

John O'May

a Devonshire baronet. Details were never lacking. One night he tacked a photograph above his cot—a photograph of a girl in evening dress—very lovely, astonishingly lovely. O'May felt his heart stirred, and there came the glimmerings of memory. "Who's that?" he asked.

"Cordelia."

"Cordelia who?"

"Cordelia O'May. My fiancée."

Cordelia O'May! Fancy it! 'Way out there, thousands of miles from anywhere, meeting your future brother-in-law in such a fashion! . . . Exactly! Fancy it!

And then there was the adventure of the nose. One falls naturally into the language of the Arabian Nights when speaking of O'May. It was a curious nose, I must admit. It presented obvious opportunity for the narrative gift. Half-way down its thin, flexible length it was broken distinctly and badly, and the lower half seemed not altogether connected with what had gone before. To O'May's countenance it added a finishing touch of *diablerie*, a supplementary leer, also an additional interest. Here, at all events, was a man to whom something of moment had once happened, even if it was no more than falling forcibly and dramatically down-stairs.

John O'May

One night he told me about his nose; I had suspected he would.

"It's an imitation nose," he said.

"A what?"

"An imitation nose. It doesn't belong to me, at least the lower half doesn't. I lost it through a dirty Swede in one of old Botha's commandos."

There was no use in asking how in a cavalry skirmish one could have ascertained the nationality of one's adversary. I awaited the sequel in silence. O'May had been removed to a hospital. They thought he wouldn't live. But he did. When he was convalescent there presented itself the question of his nose. How possibly could he go through life with such a ridiculous subtraction of feature? One imagined a hospital distraught over O'May's nose. Then out of the sunshine of an African day stepped a lady—a veiled lady—a lady who refused to give her name. About the incident was all the unexpectedness and fierceness of Oriental romance. And what had the lady come for? She had come to offer the skin of her knee to help restore O'May's shattered countenance. "And so you see," he said, "it isn't my nose at all, it's the lady's."

As to the pursuit of the vivid chance, he exhibited unexpected delicacy. How could he?

John O'May

How as a gentleman? Had the lady wanted him to know who she was she would have told him. No, one shouldn't disturb impalpabilities such as this. The whole thing was so delicate, so tenderly intriguing—and then he laughed—"and so damned ridiculous!" and suggested just the touch of Rabelaisianism for which one was looking.

Of course O'May could not live even in a great city without becoming known. There came a period of wide and sweeping popularity. His name was on every one's lips; every one repeated his stories; he was asked about constantly. Older women found him stirringly alien; younger women, possessed of an air of danger sufficient to be interesting; and the men, although from the first most of them did not like him, were grimly unable to overlook his undoubted skill at games. He played polo unexpectedly well; he rode across country like the crack of a whip; and in cricket he achieved almost immortal fame. I mention cricket particularly because it is important in O'May's story; very important. By mere chance he was asked if he was interested in the placid game. . . . Oh, a little. He had played, of course—at school. . . . He appeared in flannels and promptly knocked out a century. Playing

John O'May

myself, I marvelled at his slashing but singularly invulnerable style.

O'May accepted all this in the same unconcerned way in which he had accepted his year of leanness and obscurity; but such casual versatility is likely to bring a certain amount of disaster in its train. Before long I found that disaster had happened. O'May was not designed for unruffled good fortune. The thing grew prodigiously. I realized its seriousness when one day I called upon an old friend of mine, a woman to whom a gift for frankness had become an affectation. She attacked me on the subject of O'May. I found myself submerged in a flood of condemnation. It was a dam bursting. To combat it seemed useless. . . . But he was not a gentleman! He boasted of amorous adventure. . . . Did he mention names? . . . No, but what difference did that make? He was not the sort of person one should introduce to young women. He said he had been in the English army. Well, if he had been, for what reason had he left? He told some ridiculous story about having married for money and then having been forced by the insane jealousy of a woman he did not love to throw up his commission and obtain a divorce. Likely, wasn't it? At all events, she for one would have no more to do with him. . . .

John O'May

I sipped my tea and reflected with dumb resentment on the impossibility of destroying prejudice, old or new. Of course O'May was a gentleman; everything about him, his hands, his voice, his figure, the real ideas that lay back of all his abracadabra were those of a gentleman. As to his absurd self-glorification, at his very gloomiest he was most inclined to bolster up failing vanity by means of imaginary triumphs. Besides, there was always that business of being a derelict—the inevitable disdain and bitterness. Frequently the world must have seemed a place of too many complacent people, of judgments too cruelly made, of an unrelieved monogamous placcidity. The desire to shock it would be overwhelming. But how prove all these things? It involved the whole question of what a gentleman is. Why, I have an uncle who regards all Methodists as blackguards!

I went out into streets already lit with lamps. A fine rain was falling. I was angry and ashamed. I do not like to have people's characters flayed in my presence. There is a suggestion about it of the indecency of tortured bodies on the rack. Besides, I had had no idea of the size of the storm gathering in O'May's wake. The prospect alarmed me.

And then—just at this precarious period—

John O'May

O'May brought matters to a climax by a bit of egregious folly peculiarly his own. I don't wonder he left the English army. I have an idea that he irritated fond but distracted superiors to final angry tears.

There was a girl—I shall call her Elinor Beech—who for two or three years had basked in a reputation for beauty. Further description is unnecessary, for perfection implies finality. You saw Miss Beech, you admitted her radiance, then nothing more happened. As for myself, by the hour I talked to her gently, all the while asking in the back of my mind, "What in the world are you doing, and where in the world are you going?" For in a perfectly unconscious but coldly heated way she was going somewhere. That was evident. She possessed the bright, small, golden-haired way of looking busy and alert when she really wasn't. Poor child, life after all must have been to her a waste of level pulchritudes. For several years I had felt sorry for her, but my sorrow now changed to indignation when I perceived that in her brisk flight from flower to flower she had alighted upon the somewhat frost-bitten leaves of O'May.

To my extreme irritation O'May welcomed the distraction. He began to fancy himself as a suitor. He blossomed out into flowers in his

John O'May

buttonhole and yellow buckskin gloves. To me the whole affair smacked of speculation, with the addition, of course, of fatuous gratification at the ensnarement of a much-desired beauty. I confronted O'May with these opinions. He accepted them with his usual calm. I informed him that Miss Beech belonged to what might be called "our American royalty"; and that he was twice her age, penniless, and divorced. "Divorced, you understand!" I repeated. He looked at me mildly. "But I'm not divorced," he said.

I gasped. "Not divorced?"

"No."

"Then why in heaven's name did you tell such a lie?"

For a moment he was thoughtful, but not embarrassed. "To tell you the truth, I don't know," he observed finally. "If I could remember the circumstances, no doubt I could explain satisfactorily." Then he brightened perceptibly. "But once a story's told you have to stick by it, don't you?" He seemed much relieved by this bit of superlative wisdom.

I washed my hands of him. For a while he did not come any longer to see me. Two months passed and rumors were abroad. The older Beeches, the infatuated Beech mother and father, were, it seems, at last awake to the situation.

John O'May

Three generations of restraint had been flung aside. Mr. Beech, a choleric man, made lawless by extreme wealth, had threatened to kick O'May. O'May had laughed delightedly and had offered him a back for this purpose, warning him, however, as an apoplectic elderly person, to indulge in the new exercise gently. It was evident that he had made himself, to a man without humor, unbearably offensive. The world overlooked the engaging debonairness of this incident in its rage at O'May as a discredited adventurer. It was clear that even if willy-nilly he married Elinor Beech she would take no wealth with her. Mr. Beech had threatened disinheritance, and he was one of those men who pride themselves on keeping their word, no matter how foolish that word may be. He was bitter with the bitterness of the disenchanted parent.

Then summer came, and for me, at least, a respite from all such vexing problems.

It was Dunstan—Dunstan, delightfully heedless of gossip—who in his vague, guileless way produced a crisis and a drama. He gave a house party early in September. I am sure O'May was not aware that his captive princess was to be present, and as for her she was either equally ignorant or else had lied adroitly to her parents.

John O'May

At all events, they both turned up smiling, met in the hall, hesitated, seemed to wish to blush, and then, in the pleasure of seeing each other after a separation of three months, forgot all about everything else. The rest of us, with the exception of Dunstan, who was completely innocent, proceeded to sit apprehensively upon the edge of the crater.

The objects of our speculation meanwhile went their way as if oblivious of the talk swirling about them. I think they were happy. O'May, who shared a room with me, was preoccupied and gentler than I had ever seen him. In the violet breathless dusks before dinner the two walked in the gardens, or found inadequate excuses to motor. In the evenings they did not join us at cards or dancing, but sat on the terrace watching the immense, warm stars. Once or twice I came upon them. I must admit even my disapproving imagination was touched. There was something about O'May's lean, quiet, dark-headed figure that seemed to pick him out as a mate for the tiny, radiant fairness of the girl. Nature seemed to be wiser in this instance than Mr. Beech. After all, why not? I found myself arguing the situation in my mind. The question was—Was O'May really in love? He seemed to be. One

John O'May

night he stood by the window and stretched wide his arms.

"A man's never old, Billy," he said, "is he? I was thinking I was, but I'm not, Lord love you!" He paused. "She's sweeter than June," he said in his softest Irish voice.

The revelation pleased me. There seemed here a chance of complete regeneration. The prospect suddenly became secure, vivacious, reillusioned. And then a Packard car—a large, plum-colored Packard car—put an end to such unsubstantialities.

I found it—the car—standing in the driveway before Dunstan's house one afternoon as I came in late from riding. A smart chauffeur dozed in the last rays of the sun. Frogs croaked from a near-by pond, upon the shimmering surface of which gossamer flying things caught, for a moment as brief as their lives, a glory of light on their wings. I was not prepared for the red, carefully plump gentleman, clad in a fawn-colored silk suit, who sat in a wicker chair on the porch, his hands clasped determinedly upon a heavy walking-stick. The elderly gentleman glared at me; the carmine of his face was heightened by the level rays of the sun.

"Are you Dunstan?" he growled.

John O'May

"No, Mr. Beech," I answered amiably—my heart leapt. "You don't remember me, I see." I introduced myself. He seemed to regard the formality as an added irritation.

"Where is the fellow—the—the—what's his name?"

But at that moment I saw the unsuspecting Dunstan approaching and I fled stableward. There was not a motor to be had, but I procured a horse. The saddling seemed unbearably slow. I was afraid O'May and the girl would arrive before I could warn them. I galloped down the driveway. And then—after all this, they were late; absurdly and fatally late.

I waited by the gate at the end of the mile-long drive. A great moon swung up over the liquid darkness of the hills to the east. Would they never come? Then I heard the purr of a motor and the long gray car swept past me in a blinding arc of light. O'May's voice reached me.

"What's wrong?" he said sharply.

I stammered. "It's none of my business, but Mr. Beech—your father, Miss Beech—is waiting for you up at the house. I thought I would warn you."

There was a moment's silence before the girl's voice said, a trifle wearily:

John O'May

“It’s almost nine o’clock.”

I moved my horse to where the dazzling light was no longer in my eyes. O’May, his hand on the wheel, was looking at the girl. Suddenly he flung up his head.

“If you’re game,” he said, “so am I. I’m sick of this. Let’s get through with it.”

He threw in the clutch and the great machine groaned and leaped forward. I followed at a hand-gallop.

I had imagined nothing out of the ordinary; nothing, that is, on the surface, or I would not, when I came back from the stable, have gone in at the front entrance. As it was I stumbled suddenly into a strange, excited little group in one corner of the shadowy hall. Dunstan, astonished and ill at ease, stood with his hands in his pockets, and near him, but not noticing him, O’May and Elinor Beech and her father. The last was expressing some opinion in a restrained but obviously passionate voice. O’May was fingering a book on the table, his eyes first on the older man, then on the girl.

I was congratulating myself on slipping past unnoticed, but Mr. Beech saw me. “Here!” he said. “Here’s a man I want. I watched him gallop down to the gate—gallop right past me.

John O'May

Now, sir, what did you do that for?"—I realized what a fool I had been—"Why, may I ask?"

I stepped into the circle of light.

"Mr. Beech," I said, "I am not aware what particular houses you adorn, but judging from the way you are acting here they must be curious houses. Where I live, gentlemen can ride at a gallop any time they like without being asked nonsensical questions by comparative strangers."

O'May threw back his head. He never could resist such moments as this. I suppose more than anything else they were what had ruined him.

"Oh, I say!" he applauded. "Oh, by Jove! Got just what he deserved, didn't he?"

"You fool!" hissed Dunstan.

Very satisfactory, of course; very satisfactory, indeed; but can you imagine any idiocy greater? I can't. The effect upon Mr. Beech was instantaneous. For a moment he glared; then he turned once more to his daughter and spoke in a new and peculiarly deadly voice:

"I will waste no more words. My motor is waiting outside. You can come home with me, Elinor, or else never speak to me again. You understand? You know when I say a thing I mean it. As for you, sir,"—he wheeled upon O'May—

John O'May

"beggar that you are, I'll make you still more of one. I can do it and you know it." He looked at his watch. "You have five minutes, Elinor," he said quietly.

It was incredible. The kind of scene one does not expect. Life had suddenly slipped back to a more brutal period. Old age in a passion has a way sometimes of producing such anachronisms.

I watched attentively O'May's face and the face of the girl. I was hoping—hoping bitterly, now—that she would step forward. I for one would help O'May if she married him; so would Dunstan. Why didn't she move? Her great eyes were wide and staring. Her small, beautifully chiselled features seemed frozen to ice. God knows what processes of computation and balance were going on behind them. Possibly this was the first time in all her life she had been called upon to think. It was unbearable. Then O'May made a sudden movement.

He laid aside with the most curious care the book the leaves of which he had been absent-mindedly fluttering and stepped nearer to Mr. Beech. His whole appearance had undergone a subtle change. The fierce intentness was past; he was careless and reckless and half-smiling

John O'May

again. He thrust his hands deep in his trouser-pockets and jingled some keys.

"I've lost, Mr. Beech," he said, and inclined his head. "You can take your daughter home."

Dunstan gasped. The girl suddenly stepped back and put out a hand, but O'May did not notice it.

"And I've something more to tell you," he continued; "I——"

But the older man appreciated victory. "Not a word, sir," he said. He turned to go.

O'May leaned against the table. "Oh, very well," he agreed amiably, his gray eyes smiling, his brogue very thick. "Only I think ye'd do well to listen."

Mr. Beech hesitated.

"It's just this," said O'May. "At present ye think Elinor's a fool, don't ye? Well, she's not, Mr. Beech; far from it. I'm an old hand; it wasn't very difficult for me."

"What wasn't?"

"Well, a lot of things. To tell her my brother was a baronet, and had no children. To say I'd be worth a million or two in a short while. To show her pictures of the place of a distant cousin and let her believe it was one day to be mine. To try to elope with her to-night." He paused

John O'May

and looked about for the effect of this announcement. "Yes, just that, Mr. Beech. If it hadn't been for her common sense we'd not be here now. That's what made us late. But she wouldn't do it. She has lots of sense. She's"—he looked at her with a sudden proud, fatherly look—"she's a girl of character, Mr. Beech; take her home and be good to her."

There was silence, and then:

"You cad!" said the older man. "Go home to your divorced wife."

"My divorced wife?" asked O'May gently. "Which one, Mr. Beech?"

"Which one!"

"Yes, you didn't know I'd been divorced twice, did you?"

This was too much. I stepped forward. "There's not a word—" I began; but Mr. Beech was already on his way to the door. Over his shoulder I caught a glimpse of a delicate gold head. The girl looked back once. Her face was small and white and perplexed.

The three of us who were left remained for a moment silent by the table, then Dunstan abruptly swung on his heel and made off down a dim corridor toward a door from which came the voices of his other guests. I went out into the garden.

John O'May

Late that night I found O'May in our bedroom, smoking a cigarette and regarding the moon. "Well," I said, "I hope you've made enough of an ass of yourself to satisfy even you."

He threw away his cigarette and stood up to the full length of his lean height and stretched his arms above his head.

"Oh, no," he said. "Thank God, there's always some future foolishness left in the world."

"Would you mind telling me," I demanded, "why to an already unpleasant incident you chose to add a string of insane lies?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Certainly," he said; and for the first time I had a complete impression of a stricken face. Why, the man had been in love with the foolish little creature, after all! Really in love! "It's very simple," he continued, and yawned. One recognizes those yawns. "While there was a chance, you know; but there wasn't, not a chance. I know women's faces. Not a chance. Money wins every time. Well, it's a good horse. What do you expect? But she might just as well be off with flying colors as not, mightn't she? Otherwise, all her life—the suspicion of her being an idiot. You don't know the Beeches. It'd be hell. Don't you think I gave Elinor a reputation for an eye to

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the main chance? She couldn't have thought that up herself, you know." He cocked an eye-brow. "Besides," he concluded, "when my imagination gets started, I'll be hanged if I know where it's going to stop."

He sighed and returned to the window. His muffled voice reached me. "And I'll be damned if it wasn't the little devil herself who tried to do the running away to-night. I had the deuce of a time bringing her home."

And that was all.

I should hate having to leave O'May here; I should hate having to leave him spattered with the laughter of people not wise enough to be kind; to abandon him drearily lonely in a city where once, for a short time at least, he had been so welcome; and, fortunately, I don't have to. Life has its own jocose methods of compensation. It slaps you down into the mud, and then comes a great wind that lifts you up to the very gates, clean-swept, of heaven itself. There was to be for O'May at least one moment left of glory and illumination—a moment the spreading fame of which caused, I think, numerous people to stand agape at their own stupidity. The moment came because O'May played cricket.

Spring was on hand and with it the trip of a

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team to the West Indies. There had been some talk, I dare say, of leaving O'May off, but even the blackest social record cannot destroy the value of a top-batsman; and so, unruffled and unconcerned, he went along. In his smart tweed cap and beautifully fitting ready-made clothes he was a sight for the eye as he paced the deck. Something about his leanness and hardness seemed to make a voyage tropic-ward singularly appropriate. And, as far as any one could see, he was totally oblivious of the truth that, barring myself, the dozen other men of the party despised him utterly. Fortunately they were all too good sportsmen—all but one, that is—to make this dislike known. The one was a man named Whitton. In every body of men there seems to be a Whitton. Possibly the fact perpetuates a curse of Job. Whitton was short and dark and truculent, and, to his own mind, amusing—no, not amusing, subtly witty—any adjective expressing delicate humor will do. One gets tired of describing Whittons. Why he marked O'May as a victim I do not know, for I doubt if off the cricket-field they saw each other more than once or twice in a year. But, at all events, Whitton pursued O'May, and O'May, with his usual perverse humor, although the rest of us expected a

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quarrel, showered kindnesses on Whitton's head. We were at a loss to understand until, one day——

"I can't help liking the little devil, you know," said O'May to a group of us; "he's exactly like a stud-groom we used to have at my father's place. Vulgar little brute, but something fascinating about him."

The remark was repeated, as it was intended it should be, and an abrupt change took place in Whitton's playful venom—the playfulness disappeared. O'May was more cordial than ever.

We dropped into a blue harbor that took a half-moon slice out of a green-and-white island impossibly clean. There was to be a match with the British regiment stationed there, and the attendant dances, and a vice-regal reception; for the green-and-white island was an important place and boasted a governor-general. The night of our arrival there developed a conspiracy on the part of Whitton.

I found two or three of O'May's most ardent enemies in the smoking-room of the hotel. They seemed pleased about something. Whitton was doing the talking. He was not afraid of my presence; the plan was too insolently simple to admit of interference. Whitton, in short, was to introduce O'May to the governor-general as "Captain

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John O'May, late Tenth Hussars—Captain John O'May!"—very loud, you understand, so that there would be not the slightest chance of not being heard.

At first I failed to grasp the significance.

Whitton laughed. "Guess!" he said.

Light dawned on me. "That's a pleasant thing to do to a team-mate," I observed. "And then, you know, he might have been in the Tenth Hussars after all."

"Not a chance!" said Whitton. "He? He never was! I know a liar when I see one. I'm sick of his lies. We're all sick of his lies, aren't we?" The attendant group nodded with sinister solemnity. "Why," continued Whitton, "why, that's one of the best regiments in England. Besides, even if he did belong, he was kicked out for some dirty work."

I attempted scorn. Did they think the governor-general of a West Indian island carried the whole British army list in his head? There might have been a dozen O'Mays in the Tenth Hussars and this fellow here none the wiser.

But Whitton persisted. It was only a chance, of course, but a mighty good one. The English army was small and rather like a club. If O'May had done anything disgraceful it would be recalled

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to mind at once. If, on the other hand, he was merely an impostor, detection would be equally swift. They knew in a moment, those chaps; they could tell by a dozen hidden evidences not patent to foreigners.

"Whitton," I said, "you're a fool. Look out!"

"Who for?" he sneered.

"Me, for one," I said, getting up. "Besides, this governor-general will have too much sense to show you what he knows."

"Oh!" said Whitton. He laughed. "Oh! So you think we're right, too, do you?"

And as a matter of fact I did. The plot presented all the strength of a dilemma. If O'May was what he said he was there was no need to worry; if, to the contrary, he was none of these things, or only part of these things, there was nothing to do but to let him bear the consequences of his own folly and trust to his quick wit for a not too unpleasant escape from embarrassment. To attempt to prevent Whitton's plan would be only to fasten upon O'May forever the stamp of an impostor. Apparently the test was foredoomed. I contented myself with visions of revenge upon Whitton.

Two days later came the first day of the match.

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The Englishmen went in to bat. When dark swallowed up the grounds we were whisked off to a dinner; the reception was to follow.

Orange lamps, like little moons, hung in strange, heavy-foliaged trees. A band blared in an illuminated kiosk. Lithe young men in regimentals were officially and inexpressibly polite.

“Why don’t you get them to play some tune we know, O’May?” suggested Whitton happily.

I took this to be the first gun of the skirmish.

O’May turned. “I?”

“Yes; weren’t you an officer?”

O’May’s long nose wrinkled. “That’s not the same as a bandmaster, you know,” he explained gently.

I was keeping close to him. The time to meet the governor-general was approaching. A young aide-de-camp stepped over to us and suggested that the ceremony begin. We followed in little groups. Besides myself and Whitton there were four or five others in the lot O’May joined.

“Cheer-o!” said he. “For what is the likes of me greeting the direct and anointed representative of his Britannic Majesty. What’s the old blighter’s name?”

Sir Timothy-Something-or-Other, I told him vaguely.

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"Quaker!" he hissed. "A dollar he's a sour-faced Quaker."

We came to a big man, long-nosed, stooping, with a grizzled mustache. He looked bored. My heart sank. Here was not one of the kindly English; rather, a veteran of many climates and varied indigestion. The band seemed to me to be playing with unnecessary softness. I was presented, bowed, heard the end of an unintelligible sentence, and moved a step or two away. O'May followed. Over his shoulder I caught sight of Whitton's face. Then it seemed to me that the worst had happened; for suddenly the governor-general took a step forward, hesitated, and peered; his harsh face in the swaying shadows becoming for a moment harsher.

"Why—" said the governor-general. "Why—let me see! No! Yes! By gad!" His thin, tired face broke into an alarming grin. "Why, by all that's holy, it's Long Jack O'May!"

"Timmy Danby!" said O'May simply. "How—what in the devil are you doing here?"

In the background I stepped on Whitton's foot.

"I?" said the governor-general. "Why, I'm the governor-general!" And he spoke with apparently no realization of the absurdity of his remark. Emotion was evident on both sides.

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The governor-general breathed through his nose; he looked about him nervously. "All your fellows through?" he asked.

"I think so," answered O'May. "We're the last."

"Well, then—I'll just say a word or two—just a word, and then—look here! What do you think? We'll find a place to sit down. I want to see you, you devil. Where've you been? In the States? One of those blighted millionaires by now, I suppose. I heard you'd got out. Rotten job, the army, anyhow." He remembered his duties and turned to the silent, staring little group about him. "I trust you'll forgive me, gentlemen," he said, "but I haven't seen Captain O'May in ten years, and he was the best subaltern I ever had. These young men will be delighted to look after you." He indicated his aides-de-camp.

I turned to go, still in a haze of unreality, but O'May called me back. "No, you don't!" he said. "Do you mind, Timmy?" But his next action was the most extraordinary of all, for he laid a detaining hand on Whitton's shoulder and faced him about and said, most lovingly, "And Jerry Whitton, too? He's one of the best pals I've got. Can I bring 'em along?"

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Whitton did not understand until later, I think; nor did I, until, looking at O'May, I saw gray eyes cold and raw as Irish moors on a hunting-day.

Under a shadowy tree, a colored lantern spreading radiance through its branches, we found a table. A man servant brought us drinks.

"Long Jack!" said the governor-general.

"Old Timmy!" said O'May.

And this was the moment of which I spoke—the apotheosis of O'May. I could see him grow as he sat there; become younger. He was home—in harbor. They talked of many things—he and the governor-general—of India, of London, of men they had known; of men who had died and of men who were still alive. And in the semi-dusk, with the band sobbing a waltz and uniforms flitting in and out of orange light and shadow, with the sound of laughter reaching us, it seemed to me that O'May was no longer a derelict, no longer a man to whom the future held nothing, but once more a young subaltern, straight and taut with the pride of the great service of a great empire. I saw India, and keen-faced young men about the white and silver of a mess-table; I saw South Africa and heard cavalry marching by night across the veldt; and it wasn't merely



“On the ball, Dublin!” he said, and fell back.

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romancing on my part, for O'May, I knew, was seeing at the same time the same things as I. It was easy to understand now his recklessness toward the present. In face of his memories it must have seemed, indeed, a matter of small moment; old Mr. Beech merely an absurdity; his daughter, after her fiery test, pitiable and unheroic. At one corner of the table Whitton watched with a troubled, embarrassed face.

"You'll move your traps to-morrow and stay with me, won't you?" asked the governor-general.

"Will I!" said O'May.

That spring I was out of town for a month. I came back to find a telephone call, three days old, from O'May. It was urgent. He was in hospital. I hurried out. Yes, Captain O'May was in, a private ward on the third floor. An old wound in his head. They would see if I might go to him. There was something odd in the manner in which they told me this. I fidgeted. I remember how noisy a newly awakened fly was against the window-pane. A nurse came hurrying in. Yes, I could go to Captain O'May—yes, I could go, but I had best hurry. Hurry! Why, in God's name, did I have to hurry?

He was unconscious when I reached the narrow

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room where he was. I waited an hour; perhaps an hour and a half. The nurse busied herself with a dozen esoteric tasks. And then, suddenly, he sat up and opened his eyes and looked squarely at me.

“On the ball, Dublin!” he said, and fell back. I had never known that he had played football . . . the extraordinary man!

When I finally left, it seemed to me as if a piece of romance had been ripped, as a sword rips tapestry, from the walls of life. Old age for some people is impossible to contemplate; but then——

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ONE suspects an omniscient irony—or else a very great tenderness. God, apparently, doesn't like us to become too matter-of-fact. At all events, no sooner have we settled down to the comfortable assurance that at last we have really grown up, that at last we have really achieved common sense, when, through the corridor hours of our days mystery blows a trifle harder, as it were, stirs the hair on our foreheads, sends us back once more into the state of mind from which we thought ourselves escaped—confused, that is, wondering. And I suppose that is why people have visits like the visit, two years ago, of Ann Graham to the ranch of myself and my wife Martha, on the upper waters of the Big Cloud River—Ghost Bald-Head River, the Indians call it, because years ago a war party of Cheyennes scalped some Bannocks on its green and beautiful banks.

The visit grew out of the unexpected. Coming in late one June afternoon from riding through some cattle, I found Martha, with the recently arrived mail, scanning a newspaper a week old.

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Suddenly she laid it down with a little gesture of distress and went to the window, from which she stared across the level green nearness of the home pastures to where, beyond rolling sage-brush hills, the great mountains that surrounded our place touched a twilight sky. I lit a cigarette and watched her slim figure, outlined in its dark riding habit, against the square of fading light from outside.

"Alastair Graham's dead," she said finally, without turning. "He was shot down by a German. They've cited him for a war medal." She made with her tongue a clicking sound indicative of distaste. "Most of the article about him has to do with the fact that he was a millionaire and the son of old Huntingdon Graham. As if even death failed to make Fifth Avenue relatively unimportant! Do you want to see it—the paper?"

I expressed no exigent desire. To tell the truth, I wasn't greatly moved by Alastair Graham's death; he wasn't even my first cousin by marriage, as he was Martha's; and too many splendid young men had died before him—really splendid young men. I had never found Alastair Graham particularly splendid. On the contrary, the few times I had met him I had found him in-

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expressibly annoying—a tall, slim, blond youth with the clipped mind and the clipped syllables of his class and city. One felt, as one so often does in the presence of the young very rich, a sense of insult to the human race as a whole. And I didn't even greatly admire his having joined the flying service of France. Had the circumstances been different—but, you must remember, he had been married only a year. There was too much a suspicion of titillation run after; too much the suspicion of a harsh tearing to shreds of life; too much the impression of the lumping together as the means of sensation beautiful young women and aeroplanes. Perhaps I was unjust, but I could imagine nothing of the lucid enthusiasm that must have animated most of his companions; nothing of the grave and splendid courage of the average modern man who goes, against his will, to war. But I admitted regret; one would; especially in the presence of Martha, who regards relationship as a cloak for all incompatibility. I was unaware into what this passion for consanguinity was to lead us.

Within the week Martha had asked Ann Graham to visit us; within two weeks Ann Graham had accepted. Within the week Martha had asked, as a solace for Ann's loneliness, Ann's

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ancient suitor, Sturtevant Shaw, and within two weeks he, too, had expressed enthusiasm. These heroically altruistic acts performed, Martha proceeded, with the dryness that conceals a quick and kindly heart, to amplify her reasons for so doing. They were obvious reasons. Ann was too young, too much alone, too lovely to be cast suddenly upon a careless world; recklessness had been her habit. We were her nearest of kin; her only near relatives, in fact, for it was impossible to count as a relative her satyr-like father-in-law. Clearly it was our duty to offer her, here in this quiet, healing land, opportunity to regain some degree of poise; perhaps, although this was highly problematical, even to achieve a new and steady-ing perspective. You perceive we were idealists of sorts. People who love beyond measure cer-tain countries are likely to be. They have im-mense faith in their curative powers—in the wide quality of the sea; the soaring quality of moun-tains. But we were not altogether idealists. Sturtevant Shaw was our concession to worldli-ness. All her life Ann, we knew, had been used to the attendance of the male—a sort of single-file triumphal procession; possibly a dim racial com-pulsion for adornment balked in the more prim-i-tive satisfactions of conch-shells and slaves. At

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all events, since marriage—and we had little doubt that Ann, in her own especial way, had loved her husband—had not allayed this thirst, there was little hope that widowhood would prove more effective. In Ann's social environment the mere presence of an habitual love was seldom allowed to interfere with the far more exciting pastime of falling in love. An innocent enough pastime, no doubt—certainly so we imagined in the case of Ann—but a pastime that none the less was a habit. And Sturtevant Shaw, picked from a visioned line of vacuous faces and debonair figures, seemed likely to be the least actively offensive figure of all; the most likely to supply Ann with the necessary piquancy devoid of tactless interference with a sorrow newly acquired. Besides, as a mere practical matter of self-protection, we needed some one to take Ann off our hands. The logical chain was complete. The personal question of whether we ourselves wanted Ann did not enter into it at all.

I wish I could accurately convey to you my impressions when, a month later, in the soft violet of an August evening, I came upon Ann and Shaw on the platform of the little railroad-station fifty miles down the valley, whither I had been sent to meet them in person by a scrupulous wife. They

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were so exactly, my impressions, what I had imagined they would be. There are no eyes as sharp as those of the not too welcoming host. These two, Ann and Shaw, were so sure of themselves; so impeccable. One was aware from their attitude how much they felt they were bringing delicate perceptions, civilized reactions, into an uncouth and to-be-patronized country. And all about them, you see, was this still, unending twilight, like eternity, and, to the east, the pregnant shadow of immense black hills.

They stood in the light of a station lamp, their baggage piled around them, Ann slim and pale in her black clothes, very aureate, and her companion short, bulbous, fashionable. He called me "old man" on the score of an acquaintanceship long since discontinued, and Ann, between almost every sentence, laughed the disconnected, unreasonable laughter of her kind. I put them to bed with a grim satisfaction in the notorious discomforts of the local hotel.

Wide countries, wild countries, seem to have an excellent sense of dramatic fitness; they rain upon one when rain will make for history; they snow when blizzards will heap up a story of adventure; they are beautiful when beauty is the impression desired; and the next day was beautiful beyond

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compare. There was a fine sense of gold and blue and scintillation. With us went the cool sound of mountain streams, the warm scent of firs under a summer sun. Our way led up over a divide and then down into the valley beyond. In upland meadows Indian paint-brush flamed amidst the blue smoke of lupin. But apparently, my guests were not, as yet, prepared to concentrate their minds upon this gorgeousness of scenery. It was as if they had brought with them a bag of unfinished conversational odds and ends from which they busily drew forth embroidered personalities and scandals, worked upon them, put them back, and drew forth others. There was about this an atmosphere of duty as much as one of pleasure. My elevation of soul suffered a relapse. Even when we had reached the summit and had come out of the climbing forests to a wind-swept place where the valley rose to meet us, staccato enthusiasm for matters and people far distant did not abate. Through the distance-smoothed gray and green of the plain ran the ribbon of the river, and beyond, range upon range, blue in the August haze, was a tumultuous loveliness of further encircling hills. It was altogether heart-stopping.

To be sure. "By Jove! How fine!" said

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Shaw with the evident intention of drawing me, in the front seat, into the conversation. But he seemed unable to maintain this temporary reversion to the traditions of a gentler generation, in which it was considered necessary not to forget altogether one's host; and as for Ann, she had the directness of a more primitive sex. At the moment she was interested in something that had happened at Newport two years before.

And so we drove down the hill and so by dusk came to the ranch.

Along the rim of the western hills the sun had left a band of gold, and up to the doors of the ranch-house had crept the translucent blue haze of the evening. Here and there a window radiated yellow light, and through the quiet atmosphere, layer upon layer, the approaching night was folding over us the mountain chill. It was very silent, except for the murmuring of the river and the creaking of leather as the tired horses shook their harness. I was totally unprepared for the unexpected gesture on the part of Ann.

Shaw had descended from the wagon with the meticulous movements of an overfed and wearied man and had greeted Martha with his usual soft patronization, but Ann, when she reached the ground, did not at once follow him. Instead, she

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stood for a moment erect and very still, her face turned to the silhouette of the mountains, her head thrown back a trifle, as if she was tasting the air. At first I did not particularly notice her, and then I was suddenly struck by something in her attitude that suggested the calm delight of a swimmer who, coming to the surface, floats in the stillness of twilight water—a quietness, a concentration very foreign to her. But the mood passed, and she turned and ran up to Martha and kissed her. The three of them went into the house. A moment afterward I heard Ann's high, nasal, thoughtless laughter.

But I was not altogether unmoved. As I took the team down to the barns and unharnessed them I found myself wondering about Ann. Her laugh, however, still ringing in my ears, seemed to answer me. If there was in her some small seed worth cultivating, it must be a very small seed, indeed. Distaste was the reaction that at the moment followed. I was not a picture of the perfect host.

When I went back to the house, Ann, sprawled out, with a more than ordinarily altruistic display of slim, silk-clad leg and ankle, in a big chair before the fire, was complaining, with the over-punctuated and over-emphasized diction that,

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with her kind, passes for humor, to Martha of the hardships of the journey.

And this was my impression of Ann for the first two weeks of her stay; an impression overlaying, complementing the not particularly favorable one I already had of her. This high-voiced, drawling, hyperbolized habit of conversation! This affected habit of resentment toward unaccustomed surroundings! This attitude of the very opulent that nature should in some way or other realize, subscribe to their exceptional position! As if mountains, that is, were venerable, if slightly privileged, butlers. . . . During August in a cattle country, unless there is hay to be put up, a man has comparatively little to do, and I found myself acting as guide to Ann and Shaw. I took them long trips on horseback, I picnicked with them, fished, climbed through the belt of heavy timber that clothed the lower slopes of the hills. Intimacy such as this necessitates eventual hatred or else liking. Mere toleration is impossible. And, curiously enough, it was Shaw whom I began to like. He was not charming; there was something about his sibilant, stuttering name that fitted his bulky, stuttering personality; but he was not the aggressive fool I had thought him. In reality there are probably few aggressive fools.

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Shaw was a meek man suffering from shyness; a meek man with a pathetic and unexplainable interest in mediæval art. He was even puzzled by his position and reason in the world, carrying with him a dim perception that his wealth and idleness were somehow adventitious, not quite to be taken for granted. One was reminded of a near-sighted, harmless bee blundered into an entangling web. And underneath his layers of ineptness I discovered one altogether decisive quality: he was entirely, splendidly, self-effacingly in love with Ann. He carried it like a sword beneath a cloak. I think the uncertainty this disclosure produced within me, the dislocation of my self-assurance, had largely to do with a change that at this time took place in my attitude toward Ann. If I had been so utterly wrong in one instance, there was a chance that I might be wrong in another. At all events, my mind, beginning to seal itself tight, opened ever so slightly to the possibility of new impressions. And then, unexpectedly, here was Shaw breaking his usual silence in regard to subjective matters; breaking it, for him, with startling lucidity. The immediate cause was, I think, a complaint on my part of Ann's habit of linking in the same breath sunsets and divorce; a disillusioning habit; a habit

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that frequently gave one the feeling of being pushed from a cliff into a quagmire. Shaw and I were riding home together into the gathering darkness, and I came to myself, as it were, to find him trying, intently, to convince me of something.

"No—!" he stammered. "Not that! No! I don't know—it's hard to explain." His eyes sought the horizon in his effort to clarify his thoughts. "I wish I could make Ann clear to people," he continued. "Y'see, I've known her for twenty years—ever since she was a youngster." He laughed embarrassedly. "Sometimes," he said, "I feel more like a father to her than anything else. You believe that, don't you?"

"Yes," I answered, "I do." I hastened to relieve any misconception on his part. "I am not criticising Ann particularly," I added; "I am merely wondering about her type, that's all. It's a prevalent type. It's about three-fourths of our so-called upper class. They're like bright-winged grasshoppers, these women; just as feverish and strident and apparently fortuitous. What makes them; what are they after?"

He looked taken aback by this sudden flood of psychologic questioning. "I don't know what makes them," he answered at length; "bad condi-

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tions, I suppose. But I dare say even grasshoppers have some purpose at the back of their actions. And these people are only trying in their untrained way to find the same few fundamental things that other people, better trained, know how to go after directly. I'm a grasshopper myself, you know."

I found myself voluble with the pent-up irritation of a fortnight. "How the devil," I exclaimed, bringing my fist down on the horn of my saddle, "can a woman who has been through what Ann has been through still remain what Ann is? Can you explain it? I think in place of the old virginal attitude about the body that used to be the fashion there's come a new perverted virginal frame of mind—not about sex! Good Lord, no! —but about life as it really is. A refusal to accept its poignancy; a desire to skim across its surface as if it were the thin edge of lava above a volcano. Was Ann in the least in love with Alastair?"

He nodded his head gravely. "Oh, yes," he answered, "greatly."

"I don't believe it," I rejoined. "Not for a moment. Ann and women like her are dried pomegranates."

He seemed shocked, but he was willing to ad-

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mit that my remarks were, after all, meant as general ones. "You don't know Ann," he said at length doggedly. "I don't know her myself." He straightened up in his saddle and looked at me with an intent, brooding look. "Ann's changed, you know. Ann never was quite as feverish as she is now. Sometimes I think she must be afraid of something."

"Afraid?"

"Yes."

"Of what?"

Inspiration deserted him. "I don't know," he said lamely; "I often wonder. But people do cover up fear with words, don't they? She's so determinedly hard, isn't she? As if she was afraid to let herself go; as if she was anxious to hang on to all the old tricks for killing thought that she knows." He lit a cigarette with fat, too soft hands that trembled a little as he did so. "You don't get Ann," he concluded. "None of us do. We don't get any one ever but very clever, expressive people, and then we usually get them wrong. Nobody's a fool to themselves. And almost everybody over twenty-five's suffering like hell about something—even when they don't clearly realize it themselves."

Extraordinary, wasn't it? It set one to think-

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ing why it is usually the disjointed, careless people who in the end achieve the kindest, truest philosophy. But I was not to any extent convinced. One wouldn't be so suddenly. I merely found myself studying Ann more closely.

There were about her certain obvious things worth studying. Her mouth, for instance. I recollect that on previous occasions this mouth of Ann's had puzzled me—it was a lovely mouth, thin, red, with the hint of a curve to one corner of it; apparently an adventitious mouth; a mouth much too likely to disarm criticism. I congratulated myself, as I again recollect having done several times in the past, that I was proof against most forms of purely extrinsic pulchritude. Ann sat opposite me at meal-times, and at supper, beneath the descending light of candles under red shades, with which Martha had insisted upon decking the table of a Wyoming ranch-house, I had particularly excellent opportunity to observe the lower half of Ann's face; the lower half, with that mouth striking upon the senses like the single note of a sudden bell on a warm afternoon. One could not but remark, could not but be consistently irritated at the discrepancy between its sweet poignancy and the usual words that fell

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from it. There seemed here a striking instance of the lavish carelessness of nature. I resented this lavish carelessness of nature; resented it increasingly; quite unlooked for, Ann heightened my perplexity. The incident was like the opening and closing of a lantern shutter in a dark room. Upon a certain night Ann came to me with a book in her hand.

Every one else was, I think, in bed. I was reading by the fire in the living-room. The great room, log-walled, hung with skins, was very quiet and softly illumined. In the room beyond I heard Ann rummaging amongst the shelves of our disassorted library, and presently she was by my side, leaning over my chair.

“Do you think this is true?” she asked.

I looked down casually, but not without some interest, for this was a new and quiet tone of voice on her part. My faint interest turned abruptly to astonishment; she was holding out before me the Psalms.

You can imagine the incongruity of Ann holding out the Psalms! Thirty years ago the Anns of the world would have known them by heart, but not nowadays.

“Do you think it is true?” she insisted. “I had forgotten all about it.”

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I read:

Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?

If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.

If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; . . .

“And this?” She indicated a preceding paragraph with her finger.

“Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it.”

I twisted about in my chair so that I could look up into her face. For a moment her eyes opened wide into mine, then fell in embarrassment, like those of a child who has asked what may prove a foolish question.

“What do you mean, Ann?” I said.

Her words faltered a little. “I—I don’t know exactly how to express it,” she began. “I’ve never had anything like it to express before. It—it’s the feeling that you are never any more alone, you see—I don’t mean people—but—at night it’s as if there was no roof to your room at all, as if it was all open to the stars. Do you suppose it is what our mothers and fathers used to call religion?”

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"I suppose so," I answered. "It's what they meant, even if they didn't feel it. Have you ever read 'The Hound of Heaven'?"

She shook her head. "What a queer name!" she said. She gathered together her words as if afraid they might stumble too lamely. "You see," she explained, "it never used to be this way. I was always thinking of something very near; of what was going to happen in the next hour, or at night, of what would happen the next day." She hesitated as if struck by a sudden objection. "But suppose," she stammered, "suppose this were true, suppose God or something did notice people, do you suppose he would choose an unimportant person—a person like myself?"

Unimportant! Here was further revelation! "Perhaps there's no choosing about it," I suggested. "Perhaps the thing you're talking about is with every one, always, only needing something to call it forth. Besides, I've never heard about importance or unimportance in this connection. Do you think yourself unimportant?"

She looked down at me with a swift, troubled glance. "Yes," she said breathlessly, "for the first time in my life."

With a fluttering movement she slipped around past me and sat down on the black bearskin that

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covered the hearth, cross-legged, her chin in her hand, her eyes brooding upon the glowing logs.

I sucked at my pipe and gazed at the slim, childlike figure at my feet. The light from the fire touched the gold of her hair with deeper color and heightened the pure outline of her face. I experienced that odd consciousness of the immateriality of the flesh that sometimes, very rarely, and then only in especial moods, comes to all of us in the presence of another person; a strange elation, an impulse of inspiration, a piercing tenderness for this person as a symbol of all baffled, inexpressive humanity. Ann might have been stepping out of her ordinary self as a flame steps out of the indurateness of a log. But the mood faded; faded with some confusion on my part that apparently my convictions could so easily be upset.

Ann stirred from her reverie. Perhaps she, too, was a trifle ashamed. She stood up briskly.

“It’s late,” she said. “Good night!”

The morning is as cruelly and healthily matter-of-fact as the night so often is cruelly meretricious. Ann possessed my midnight, but Ann failed entirely to intrigue my breakfast. I felt slightly indignant, as if I had been let in for something, she appeared so full-armored, even to too much

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powder on her nose; she was so brightly vigorous, intent upon an expedition that she and Shaw had planned for the day. And yet I was not very angry with her; in reality I was rather relieved. It is disturbing to have one's preconceived ideas upset. However gratifying it may be to discover a soul where before no soul has been suspected, it is always disconcerting. It is so much easier to keep people in the categories where you have put them; spiritual jacks-in-boxes are upsetting. I was amused at myself.

But I need not have been. Revealing episodes are never isolated except where people fail to see each other again. The first, the second, are like little trickles of water from a dam; presently the dam breaks loose.

August had begun to spread comparatively hot nights across the valley, and now to these had been added the unearthly white radiance of a full moon in great altitudes. There was no dark at all except in the early evenings, and one felt the sustained exaltation that is part of a temporary escape from the laws of the universe. As I had business to transact in the more distant parts of my ranch, I chose the nights to ride in. It was easier on my horse; there was a mystic delight in galloping into the pellucid gold of the air. As a

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rule I came back late. The ranch would be asleep; a pool of shadowy trees, of shadowy houses, incredibly undisturbed. My dog would come out to lick my hand, tiptoeing, it seemed, his nose cold with the crispness that even in warm weather is never very far away from mountain countries. On one of these nights I came across Ann.

She was standing just beyond a little grove of aspen-trees through which ran the road from the main gate into my place, and I did not see her until my horse snorted and shied to one side, for in the white cloak she had on she seemed part of the moonlight and of the delicate, ghostly silver of the trunks behind her. Apparently she had not heard my approach, for she gave no sign of noticing me; did not stir from her rigid attitude; her hands clasped in front of her; her head thrown back as if she was looking at something far down the valley. For a moment or so I watched her from my horse, then I dismounted and walked toward her, not entirely conscious as yet of the oddness of the situation. I imagine I began with the customary laugh.

“Ann!”

I took her arm. The eerie unpleasantness that is part of meeting a person walking in sleep con-

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tracted my fingers. But she was not asleep. Her eyes recognized me fully as she turned her head slowly toward me. "Oh," she said, "so it's you, is it?"

"Yes; what are you doing?" No doubt my voice was sharp with the impatience of the masculine mind suspecting feminine excitability. At all events, I was not prepared for Ann's next action. Suddenly she raised her clinched hands and beat impotently upon my breast.

"Oh, you!" she sobbed. "All of you! You laugh at me because I don't understand! You think I'm a fool! No one has ever shown me how to understand!" And she turned and fled through the trees. For a few feet I pursued her; then I went quietly back to my horse. Here was a growing accumulation of things to think over. What couldn't Ann understand? Oddly enough the idea of hysteria never occurred to me. Somehow it seemed too far removed from Ann's shrewd, if staccato, personality.

Nor did Ann the next day mention the scene of the night before. Her very silence gave to it an added weight. I wondered if it was her custom to walk alone, by night, and to search the horizon with her eyes.

Presently a new attitude began to show itself

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in Shaw. Hitherto the most unassuming of suitors, he developed symptoms of pressing his desires more ardently; of pressing them with an unfailing ardor. Apparently he could never see enough of Ann. He exhibited unusual determination and ingenuity in capturing her for himself alone. In the evenings he had always an endless lot to say to her. I would see them in front of the ranch-house, walking in and out of the shadows of the trees, talking earnestly. With the inevitable idiocy of mankind in this respect I thought this well. If Shaw could only begin to interest Ann in his own thoroughly healthy and material person! Shaw himself put an end to such idyllic conjectures. He burst in upon me late one night, when I was writing at my desk, and, although I did not look up, I felt the presence of his disturbance.

“Well?” I said, turning about.

He was lighting a cigarette with little jerky movements. Under his ridiculous upturned mustache his lips were drawing in and out like the neck of an agitated frog.

“What’s the matter?” I asked, laying down my pen.

He flicked the ashes off his cigarette. “Ann,” he said shortly.

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“Ann?”

“Yes.” He was greatly distressed, greatly confused, wanted greatly to talk.

“I can’t make her out at all,” he said in a monotonous, halting voice. Suddenly he stood up straight, his hands deep in his pockets, and faced me squarely, his jaws set doggedly. “Look here!” he asked. “Did you ever know a sane person to talk about wings?”

“Wings? What do you mean?”

“Just that. Talk about hearing ‘em at night! Talk about wings coming and going in the air! And yet she’s sane; I know it. To-night I told her she was like one of those people you read about in medicine who’s been hit in such a way that part of them’s dead. Everything else going on all right, you see, but part of them dead. I—I got damned mad with her. You do, you know, when . . .”

“Yes,” I agreed, “you do.”

“Well, I suddenly found she was laughing. Not at me, you understand, but as if to herself—quietly; you might say happily. That was queer enough, but what she said was queerer still. She put her hand on my arm. ‘Poor old Sturdy,’ she said; ‘so you think part of me is dead, do you? Isn’t that odd? Why, it’s the only part

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of me that's ever been really alive. You're a ghost, and most of me's a ghost, and almost all our friends are ghosts; funny, bloodless little ghosts, in a world one-half of which, perhaps the most important half, we never raise our eyes to look at or strain our ears to hear.' ” Shaw spread out his arms. “And now,” he asked, “what in God's name do you make of that?”

“Was that all?”

“No, it wasn't. You remember how, about an hour ago, there were queer little black clouds sailing across the moon? Well, one of these came up just then and everything was in darkness, and Ann suddenly stopped and touched my arm. ‘Listen!’ she said. I tell you, it was uncanny. It—it made me feel all sort of cold.”

“And you did listen?”

“Of course.”

“What did you hear?”

Shaw evaded my eyes. “Well”—he hesitated—“there was a kind of wind came up that wasn't there before, and, of course—you can imagine anything you want to, you know—that is—”

He fumbled in his pockets for his cigarette-case. I tried to focus his attention.

“And this—this wind?”

He failed miserably to find what he was search-

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ing after. Suddenly he raised his head and looked at me with an odd, shrinking confusion in his eyes.

“It sounded,” he said, “like an aeroplane—far up—way above us.”

For a moment I stared at him coldly; then I was in front of him, shaking him by his arm.

“It won’t do, Shaw!” I commanded. “Won’t do at all! No, not even in times like these! We’re sensible men and can’t let ourselves believe such things even for a second. We—we can’t let ourselves go. No!”

“We?” he asked dully. “Have you heard it, too?”

His childlike sincerity broke the spell. I stepped back, ashamed of myself. “It makes no difference,” I said quietly, “what any one imagines he has heard. You can hear all sorts of things when a wind is blowing. The point is, we’re supposed to be intelligent human beings. I don’t think there’s anything very mysterious, after all. On the contrary, it’s rather easily explainable. We’ve all of us merely made the mistake of assuming that Ann was not nearly as much in love with her husband as she was—and is; that she wasn’t capable of being very much in love with any one. Moreover, we doubted her im-

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agation. It seems she has too much. Alastair Graham was killed in an airplane, you remember. If I were you, I'd leave her alone. I wouldn't be precipitous."

He shook his head. "Not once," he said, "have I made one of the mistakes concerning Ann you refer to. And as for precipitous, good Lord!"

And I dare say I would never have known more of the matter than I did at the moment had it not been for an accidental night that Ann and I spent on the top of a mountain divide, huddled in the lee of a fir-tree against the driving rain. It was not altogether an accidental night, for at the back of my brain had been the thought that possibly we might be caught out in some such fashion, although on the surface it seemed as if, by leaving the ranch early, we could easily get back by dusk. I was a game warden and had been notified to follow a party suspected of illegal killing—a party of youths, easily trailed and easily disciplined. So I asked Ann. Lately I had been losing none of the rare opportunities given me to talk to her.

Evening found us still following tracks that led up a narrow, secret valley and then to the top of a great, wind-swept plateau. My quarry had moved from where I had thought to find it; but

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Ann seemed in no wise disturbed by my suggesting the possibility of a camp in the open. She resolutely insisted upon going forward. Meanwhile, with dusk, a fine rain had come up, making it increasingly difficult to find the horseshoe prints before us. We came to the yawning throat of a canyon on the far side of the plateau, and I stopped. I could see no farther. "Here's where we spend the night," I announced. "Do you mind, Ann?"

She laughed in the darkness. "No," she said.

In the wet night we picketed our horses and found a huge, sheltering tree and an old log to start a fire with. Presently the leaping flames made a circle of light as secure as the walls of a house. I had some chocolate, a few raisins, the remains of our lunch. After we had eaten, I rolled Ann a cigarette. She sat in her favorite cross-legged position before the fire, smoking quietly. All around us was the gusty blackness filled with voices. I felt in something of the same mood as when Ann had handed me the Psalms, only a warmer mood, a more human one—Ann was very small. I began to get drowsy. I think I had closed my eyes when Ann stirred from her reverie and spoke. "Death is a queer thing, isn't it?" she said.

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I did not answer her, for I knew that she had only begun.

"It's a relaxing thing—it's like that soft cleanliness that comes after a thunder-shower on a muggy July day. Everything seems so simple."

"How do you mean, Ann?" I asked.

"Well, take Alastair and myself. If we'd both gone on living I'd never have understood him better than I did a month after we were married. And, of course, my not understanding him would have made me all the time harder for him to understand, too. It isn't very happy to love a person and feel so many barriers between him and yourself—all sorts of barriers of flesh and mind. But when a person dies that all seems to blow away, leaving the one beautiful thing you fell in love with but afterward never could exactly get hold of again. I suppose, you know, Alastair and I would have been like all the rest of my married friends."

"And Alastair, did he have that beautiful thing?" She had never before mentioned his name to me.

She threw the end of her cigarette into the fire. "Of course," she said. "All people who are loved have something beautiful about them, at first, anyway, haven't they? But Alastair had it

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a great deal—oh, yes, under all his foolishness—for he was young and hadn't been much hurt as yet. I'm sometimes glad, almost, he didn't live so that I couldn't hurt it any more. . . . It's like a bird, isn't it?" she said after a silence. "And when people are alive it's always knocking against the walls of their hearts. Only after a while they're afraid to listen to it, because they think most people don't really like birds; when, as a matter of fact, every one else is in the same condition. It's only when you're dead that the bird flies out and up; glad, like a bird, to be free at last. Would you roll me another cigarette?"

I made a bed for her out of my "slicker" and the dry side of the saddle-blankets. She fell asleep with the casualness of a child.

I do not know when it was that my own uneasy slumbers were disturbed. The rain had ceased and the night had grown suddenly cold, with a myriad stars in an opaque sky, and, toward the north, one great incandescent spear of the aurora borealis reaching up to the zenith. Without raising my head I was aware that Ann was awake. Then I made out her figure, a slim shadow standing by the embers of the dying fire. Something in her attitude held me silent; something that was similar to the attitude in which I

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had discovered her in the grove of aspen-trees. And as I watched she bent her head slowly back until she must have looked directly at the stars, and with her arms she made a gesture as if welcoming to them something from the air above.

It occurred to me that never before had I heard distant waterfalls so constant in their sound, so sibilant, so like the droning of a huge bee. . . .

Looking back upon it now, it seems to me that all along I had been anticipating the mountain climb that Ann and Shaw and myself took a fortnight later. Looking back upon it, the climb seems as inevitable as the mountains themselves. Previously we had climbed a little, but only in the foot-hills; now Ann had set her heart upon a distant, snow-blanketed peak. "If we could only get up just part way!" she had said with the new, rather breathless enthusiasm that had recently been growing upon her. On a September day we set out.

Our way at first led across the rolling expanse of sage-brush flats, then up through the heavy timber of the lower slopes, until, riding between tall pines, we came to small open meadows heavy with grass and sunlight. In one of these we tied our horses and, putting on our hobnailed boots, started up the bare shoulder of rock before us.

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Ann climbed with the triumphant vigor of youth; Shaw with the dogged tenacity of his temperament. Presently we stopped to rest.

Below us dropped away the great encompassing belt of timber, and beyond this stretched the wide, silver-gray expanse of the valley cut through its centre by the sparkling silver of the river. To the north and east were distant hills, dark green, violet, brown, singularly clear in the soft air, while above us, like giant banners flung defiantly up into the blue, were the blue and white mountains.

By noon we came to a little stream and had our lunch. We were getting up higher by now. The few trees left us were stunted and gnarled pines, bent by the winds and snows, and in place of the warm, crisp air of the forests was the dry, burnt smell of sun-scorched lichen and the keen, heady atmosphere of high altitudes. Every now and then these were cut across by the pungent aroma of small, late-blossoming flowers.

Ann flung herself full length on the soft moss and stared up at the cloudless sky. "I had no idea of this," she said drowsily. "No idea at all." She sighed contentedly. For a while there was no sound except the gurgling of the little stream between its banks of broken stones. I



With her arms she made a gesture as if welcoming to them something from the air above.

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Wings of the Morning

looked over at Shaw; his head had fallen back; he was asleep. Ann sat up and watched him with a quizzical smile. "He does more than he should," she said softly. "He is very brave."

"And you?" I asked. "Aren't you tired?"

She shook her head. "I'm never tired," she said, and clasped her knees with her hands and stared down into the valley. "Do you know what is the matter with the people who were brought up as I was," she asked—"the people who all their lives are sunk, like I was, in a feather bed? It's because they never know until too late what it is to climb; never know what it is to hold on to something long after it seems one's heart can stand it not a moment longer."

Shaw rolled over, opened an eye, and stared at us. "Hello!" he ejaculated. "Gracious! We ought to be going."

We climbed higher, into the receding blue.

Mountains are lovelier by mid-afternoon, I think, than even by dawn or in the freshness of morning. The long lights fall across the canyons as quietly as sleep made visible. To one side of us the cliffs grew steeper, while above us a clump of ragged dwarf pine, our nearest objective, drew nearer. Looking at the others, I saw that they were possessed with the same elation of a purpose

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almost accomplished as myself; and then, as is always the case, the last few steps were as nothing, and, passing the fringe of twisted trees, we stood upon the rim of a little valley, green and still and enchanted. In its bowl rested a tiny lake and beyond were the scarred sides of the final summit. That was all; it was very breathless; none of us spoke. I turned to Ann. . . .

I do not know how to describe what followed; I do not know how to give it the proper emotion, the proper emphasis. I am afraid if I tell it just as it occurred I will seem too sudden, too removed from what we choose to call the reality of life, and yet how can I tell it except as it occurred? And great heights are in themselves abrupt; have about them a quality of making the ordinary unreal, the extraordinary usual—a fine, thin, rare amplification of the outer edges of facts. For, as I turned to Ann, I saw her standing, her lips a little open, looking up at the dazzling arc of the sky, and suddenly she threw an arm up, as if to ward off a sight too blinding, and with a queer, soft, broken cry fell forward on her face.

I leaped toward her, but Shaw was there before me, bending over her, the most curious twisted look on his mask-like face. . . . I don't know—it was all so unbelievable and yet so logical; I

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had no sense of tragedy at the time; I have not been able, except by deliberate thought, to achieve a sense of tragedy since then. Often I blame myself; and yet—tragedy is, in reality, only the sense of failure. How can consummation be that?

After a while I looked up to where Ann had made her gesture. In the wide empty spaces of the sky an eagle, so high it was merely a pin-point of shadow, floated on unconquered wings.

Odd, wasn't it, there should have been an eagle there just then?

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A CUP OF TEA

A Cup of Tea

ment hardly has hours enough in a day to appreciate all of them and at the same time keep appointments.

On this February night, at all events, he was extremely late, even beyond his custom, and Mrs. Malcolm, having waited as long as she possibly could, sighed amusedly and told her man to announce dinner. There were only three others besides herself in the drawing-room, Masters—Sir John Masters, the English financier—and his wife, and Mrs. Selden, dark, a little silent, with a flushed, finely cut face and a slightly sorrow-stricken mouth. And already these people had reached the point where talk is interesting. People did in Mrs. Malcolm's house. One went there with anticipation, and came away with the delightful, a little vague, exhilaration that follows an evening where the perfection of the material background—lights, food, wine, flowers—has been almost forgotten in the thrill of contact with real persons, a rare enough circumstance in a period when the dullest people entertain the most. In the presence of Mrs. Malcolm even the very great forgot the suspicions that grow with success and became themselves, and, having come once, came again vividly, overlooking other people who really had more right to their attentions than had she.

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This was the case with Sir John Masters. And he was a very great man indeed, not only as the world goes but in himself: a short, heavy man, with a long, heavy head crowned with vibrant, still entirely dark hair and pointed by a black, carefully kept beard, above which arose—"arose" is the word, for Sir John's face was architectural—a splendid, slightly curved nose—a buccaneering nose; a nose that, willy-nilly, would have made its possessor famous. One suspected, far back in the yeoman strain, a hurried, possibly furtive marriage with gypsy or Jew; a sudden blossoming into lyricism on the part of a soil-stained Masters. Certainly from somewhere Sir John had inherited an imagination which was not insular. Dangerous men, these Sir Johns, with their hooked noses and their lyric eyes!

Mrs. Malcolm described him as fascinating. There was about him that sense of secret power that only politicians, usually meretriciously, and diplomats, and, above all, great bankers as a rule possess; yet he seldom talked of his own life, or the mission that had brought him to New York; instead, in his sonorous, slightly Hebraic voice, he drew other people on to talk about themselves, or else, to artists and writers and their sort, discovered an amazing, discouraging knowledge of the

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trades by which they earned their living. "One feels," said Mrs. Malcolm, "that one is eying a sensitive python. He uncoils beautifully."

They were seated at the round, candle-lit table, the rest of the room in partial shadow, Sir John looking like a lost Rembrandt, and his blonde wife, with her soft English face, like a rose-and-gray portrait by Reynolds, when Burnaby strode in upon them . . . strode in upon them, and then, as if remembering the repression he believed in, hesitated, and finally advanced quietly toward Mrs. Malcolm. One could smell the snowy February night still about him.

"I'm so sorry," he said. "I—"

"You broke down, I suppose," said Mrs. Malcolm, "or the noon train from Washington was late for the first time in six years. What do you do in Washington, anyway? Moon about the Smithsonian?"

"No," said Burnaby, as he sank into a chair and unfolded his napkin. "Y'see—well, that is—I ran across a fellow—an Englishman—who knew a chap I met last summer up on the Francis River—I didn't exactly meet him, that is, I ran into him, and it wasn't the Francis River really, it was the Upper Liara, a branch that comes in from the northwest. Strange, wasn't it?—this

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fellow, this Englishman, got to talking about tea, and that reminded me of the whole thing." He paused on the last word, and, with a peculiar habit that is much his own, stared across the table at Lady Masters, but over and through her, as if that pretty pink-and-white woman had entirely disappeared, and the warm shadows behind her, and in her place were no one could guess what vistas of tumbling rivers and barren tundras.

"Tea!" ejaculated Mrs. Malcolm.

Burnaby came back to the flower-scented circle of light.

"Yes," he said soberly, "tea. Exactly."

Mrs. Malcolm's delicate eyebrows rose to a point. "What," she asked, in the tones of delighted motherhood overlaid with a slight exasperation which she habitually used toward Burnaby, "has tea got to do with a man you met on the Upper Liara last summer and a man you met this afternoon? Why tea?"

"A lot," said Burnaby cryptically, and proceeded to apply himself to his salad, for he had refused the courses his lateness had made him miss. "Y'see," he said, after a moment's reflection, "it was this way—and it's worth telling, for it's queer. I ran into this Terhune this afternoon at a club—a big, blond Englishman who's been in

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the army, but now is out making money. Owns a tea-house in London. Terhune & Terhune—perhaps you know them?" He turned to Sir John.

"Yes, very well. I imagine this is Arthur Terhune."

"That's the man. Well, his being in tea and that sort of thing got me to telling him about an adventure I had last summer, and, the first crack out of the box, he said he remembered the other chap perfectly—had known him fairly well at one time. Odd, wasn't it, when you come to think of it? A big, blond, freshly bathed Englishman in a club, and that other man away up there!"

"And the other man? Is he in the tea business too?" asked Mrs. Selden. She was interested by now, leaning across the table, her dark eyes catching light from the candles. It was something—to interest Mrs. Selden.

"No," said Burnaby abruptly. "No. He's in no business at all, except going to perdition. Y'see, he's a squaw-man—a big, black squaw-man, with a nose like a Norman king's. The sort of person you imagine in evening clothes in the Carleton lounge. He might have been anything but what he is."

"I wonder," said Sir John, "why we do that

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sort of thing so much more than other nations?
Our very best, too. It's odd."

"It was odd enough the way it happened to me, anyhow," said Burnaby. "I'd been knocking around up there all summer, just an Indian and myself—around what they call Fort Francis and the Pelly Lakes, and toward the end of August we came down the Liara in a canoe. We were headed for Lower Post on the Francis, and it was all very lovely until, one day, we ran into a rapid, a devil of a thing, and my Indian got drowned."

"How dreadful!" murmured Lady Masters.

"It was," agreed Burnaby; "but it might have been worse—for me, that is. It couldn't have been much worse for the poor devil of an Indian, could it? But I had a pretty fair idea of the country, and had only about fifty miles to walk, and a little waterproof box of grub turned up out of the wreck, so I wasn't in any danger of starving. It was lonely, though—it's lonely enough country, anyhow, and of course I couldn't help thinking about that Indian and the way big rapids roar. I couldn't sleep when night came—saw black rocks sticking up out of white water like the fangs of a mad dog. I was pretty near the horrors, I guess. So you can imagine I wasn't

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sorry when, about four o'clock of the next afternoon, I came back to the river again and a teepee standing up all by itself on a little pine-crowned bluff. In front of the teepee was an old squaw—she wasn't very old, really, but you know how Indians get—boiling something over a fire in a big pot. 'How!' I said, and she grunted. 'If you'll lend me part of your fire, I'll make some tea,' I continued. 'And if you're good, I'll give you some when it's done.' Tea was one of the things cached in the little box that had been saved. She moved the pot to one side, so I judged she understood, and I trotted down to the river for water and set to work. As you can guess, I was pretty anxious for any kind of conversation by then, so after a while I said brightly: 'All alone?' She grunted again and pointed over her shoulder to the teepee. 'Well, seeing you're so interested,' said I, 'and that the tea's done, we'll all go inside and ask your man to a party—if you'll dig up two tin cups. I've got one of my own.' She raised the flap of the teepee and I followed her. I could see she wasn't a person who wasted words. Inside a little fire was smouldering, and seated with his back to us was a big, broad-shouldered buck, with a dark blanket wrapped around him. 'Your good wife,' I began

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cheerily—I was getting pretty darned sick of silence—‘has allowed me to make some tea over your fire. Have some? I’m ship-wrecked from a canoe and on my way to Lower Post. If you don’t understand what I say, it doesn’t make the slightest difference, but for God’s sake grunt—just once, to show you’re interested.’ He grunted. ‘Thanks!’ I said, and poured the tea into the three tin cups. The squaw handed one to her buck. Then I sat down.

“There was nothing to be heard but the gurgling of the river outside and the rather noisy breathing we three made as we drank; and then—very clearly, just as if we’d been sitting in an English drawing-room—in the silence a voice said: ‘By Jove, that’s the first decent cup of tea I’ve had in ten years!’ Yes, just that! ‘By Jove, that’s the first decent cup of tea I’ve had in ten years!’ I looked at the buck, but he hadn’t moved, and then I looked at the squaw, and she was still squatting and sipping her tea, and then I said, very quietly, for I knew my nerves were still ragged, ‘Did any one speak?’ and the buck turned slowly and looked me up and down, and I saw the nose I was talking about—the nose like a Norman king’s. I was rattled, I admit; I forgot my manners. ‘You’re English!’ I gasped out;

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and the buck said very sweetly: 'That's none of your damned business.'"

Burnaby paused and looked about the circle of attentive faces. "That's all. But it's enough, isn't it? To come out of nothing, going nowhere, and run into a dirty Indian who says: 'By Jove, that's the first decent cup of tea I've had in ten years!' And then along comes this Terhune and says that he knows the man."

Mrs. Malcolm raised her chin from the hand that had been supporting it. "I don't blame you," she said, "for being late."

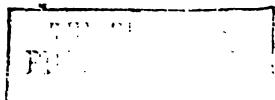
"And this man," interrupted Sir John's sonorous voice, "this squaw-man, did he tell you anything about himself?"

Burnaby shook his head. "Not likely," he answered. "I tried to draw him out, but he wasn't drawable. Finally he said: 'If you'll shut your damned mouth I'll give you two dirty blankets to sleep on. If you won't I'll kick you out of here.' The next morning I pulled out, leaving him crouched over the little teepee fire nursing his knees. But I hadn't gone twenty yards when he came to the flap and called out after me: 'I say!' I turned about sullenly. His dirty face had a queer, cracked smile on it. 'Look here! Do you—where did you get that tea from, any-



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way? I—there's a lot of skins I've got; I don't suppose you'd care to trade, would you?' I took the tea out of the air-tight box and put it on the ground. Then I set off down river. Henderson, the factor at Lower Post, told me a little about him: his name—it wasn't assumed, it seems; and that he'd been in the country about fifteen years, going from bad to worse. He was certainly at 'worse' when I saw him." Burnaby paused and stared across the table again with his curious, far-away look. "Beastly, isn't it?" he said, as if to himself. "Cold up there now, too! The snow must be deep." He came back to the present. "And I suppose, you know," he said, smiling deprecatingly at Mrs. Selden, "he's just as fond of flowers and lights and things as we are."

Mrs. Selden shivered.

"Fonder!" said Sir John. "Probably fonder. That sort is. It's the poets of the world who can't write poetry who go to smash that way. They ought to take a term at business, and"—he reflected—"the business men, of course, at poetry." He regarded Burnaby with his inscrutable eyes, in the depths of which danced little flecks of light.

"What did you say this man's name was?" asked Lady Masters, in her soft voice. She had

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an extraordinary way of advancing, with a timid rush, as it were, into the foreground, and then receding again, melting back into the shadows. She rarely ever spoke without a sensation of astonishment making itself felt. "She is like a mist," thought Mrs. Malcolm.

"Bewsher," said Burnaby—"Geoffrey Boisselier Bewsher. Quite a name, isn't it? He was in the cavalry. His family are rather swells in an old-fashioned way. He is the fifth son—or seventh, or whatever it is—of a baronet and, Terhune says, was very much in evidence about London twenty-odd years ago. Terhune used to see him in clubs, and every now and then dining out. Although he himself, of course, was a much younger man. Very handsome he was, too, Terhune said, and a favorite. And then one day he just disappeared—got out—no one knows exactly why. Terhune doesn't. Lost his money, or a woman, or something like that. The usual thing, I suppose. I— You didn't hurt yourself, did you? . . ."

He had paused abruptly and was looking across the table; for there had been a little tinkle and a crash of breaking glass, and now a pool of champagne was forming beside Lady Masters's plate, and finding its way in a thin thread of gold along

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the cloth. There was a moment's silence, and then she advanced again out of the shadows with her curious soft rush. "How clumsy I am!" she murmured. "My arm— My bracelet! I—I'm so sorry!" She looked swiftly about her, and then at Burnaby. "Oh, no! I'm not cut, thanks!" Her eyes held a pained embarrassment. He caught the look, and her eyelids flickered and fell before his gaze, and then, as the footman repaired the damage, she sank back once more into the half-light beyond the radiance of the candles. "How shy she is!" thought Burnaby. "So many of these English women are so queer. She's an important woman in her own right, too." He studied her furtively.

Into the soft silence came Sir John's carefully modulated voice. "Barbara and I," he explained, "will feel this very much. We both knew Bewsher." His eyes became sombre. "This is very distressing," he said abruptly.

"By Jove!" ejaculated Burnaby, and raised his head like an alert hound.

"How odd it all is!" said Mrs. Malcolm. But she was wondering why men are so queer with their wives—resent so much the slightest social clumsiness on their part, while in other women—provided the offense is not too great—it merely

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amuses them. Even the guarded manners of Sir John had been disturbed. For a moment he had been very angry with the shadow that bore his name; one could tell by the swift glance he had cast in her direction. After all, upsetting a glass of champagne was a very natural sequel to a story such as Burnaby had told, a story about a former acquaintance—perhaps friend.

Sir John thoughtfully helped himself to a spoonful of his dessert before he looked up; when he did so he laid down his spoon and sat back in his chair with the manner of a man who has made a sudden decision. "No," he said, and an unexpected little smile hovered about his lips, "it isn't so odd. Bewsher was rather a figure of a man twenty years ago. Shall I tell you his history?"

To Mrs. Malcolm, watching with alert, humorous eyes, there came a curious impression, faint but distinct, as wind touching her hair; as if, that is, a door into the room had opened and shut. She leaned forward, supporting her chin in her hand.

"Of course," she said.

Sir John twisted between his fingers the stem of his champagne-glass and studied thoughtfully the motes of light at the heart of the amber wine.

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“You see,” he began thoughtfully, “it’s such a difficult story to tell—difficult because it took twenty-five—and, now that Mr. Burnaby has furnished the sequel, forty-five years—to live; and difficult because it is largely a matter of psychology. I can only give you the high lights, as it were. You must fill in the rest for yourselves. You must imagine, that is, Bewsher and this other fellow—this Morton. I can’t give you his real name—it is too important; you would know it. No, it isn’t obviously dramatic. And yet”—his voice suddenly became vibrant—“such things compose, as a matter of fact, the real drama of the world. It—” he looked about the table swiftly and leaned forward, and then, as if interrupting himself, “but what *was* obviously dramatic,” he said—and the little dancing sparks in the depths of his eyes were peculiarly noticeable—“*was* the way I, of all people, heard it. Yes. You see, I heard it at a dinner-party like this, in London; and Morton—the man himself—told the story.” He paused, and with half-closed eyes studied the effect of his announcement.

“You mean—?” asked Burnaby.

“Exactly.” Sir John spoke with a certain cool eagerness. “He sat up before all those people and told the inner secrets of his life; and of them

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all I was the only one who suspected the truth. Of course, he was comparatively safe, none of them knew him well except myself, but think of it! The bravado—the audacity! Rather magnificent, wasn't it?" He sank back once more in his chair.

Mrs. Malcolm agreed. "Yes," she said. "Magnificent and insulting."

Sir John smiled. "My dear lady," he asked, "doesn't life consist largely of insults from the strong to the weak?"

"And were all these people so weak, then?"

"No, in their own way they were fairly important, I suppose, but compared to Morton they were weak—very weak— Ah, yes! I like this custom of smoking at table. Thanks!" He selected a cigarette deliberately, and stooped toward the proffered match. The flame illumined the swarthy curve of his beard and the heavy lines of his dark face. "You see," he began, straightening up in his chair, "the whole thing—that part of it, and the part I'm to tell—is really, if you choose, an allegory of strength, of strength and weakness. On the one side Morton—there's strength, sheer, undiluted power, the thing that runs the world; and on the other Bewsher, the ordinary man, with all his mixed-up ideas of right

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and wrong and the impossible, confused thing he calls a 'code'—Bewsher, and later on the girl. She too is part of the allegory. She represents—what shall I say? A composite portrait of the ordinary young woman? Religion, I suppose. Worldly religion. The religion of most of my good friends in England. A vague but none the less passionate belief in a heaven populated by ladies and gentlemen who dine out with a God who resembles royalty. And coupled with this religion the girl had, of course, as have most of her class, a very distinct sense of her own importance in the world; not that exactly—personally she was over-modest; a sense rather of her importance as a unit of an important family, and a deep-rooted conviction of the fundamental necessity of unimportant things: parties, and class-worship, and the whole jumbled-up order as it is. The usual young woman, that is, if you lay aside her unusual beauty. And, you see, people like Bewsher and the girl haven't much chance against a man like Morton, have they? Do you remember the girl, my dear?" he asked, turning to his wife.

"Yes," murmured Lady Masters.

"Well, then," continued Sir John, "you must imagine this Morton, an ugly little boy of twelve, going up on a scholarship to a great public school

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—a rather bitter little boy, without any particular prospects ahead of him except those his scholarship held out; and back of him a poor, stunted life, with a mother in it—a sad, dehumanized creature, I gathered, who subsisted on the bounty of a niggardly brother. And this, you can understand, was the first thing that made Morton hate virtue devoid of strength. His mother, he told me, was the best woman he had ever known. The world had beaten her unmercifully. His earliest recollection was hearing her cry at night. . . . And there, at the school, he had his first glimpse of the great world that up to then he had only dimly suspected. Dramatic enough in itself, isn't it?—if you can visualize the little dark chap. A common enough drama, too, the Lord knows. We people on top are bequeathing misery to our posterity when we let the Mortons of the world hate the rich. And head and shoulders above the other boys of his age at the school was Bewsher; not that materially, of course, there weren't others more important; Bewsher's family was old and rich as such families go, but he was very much a younger son, and his people lived mostly in the country; yet even then there was something about him—a manner, an adeptness in sports, an unsought popularity, that picked him

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out; the beginnings of that Norman nose that Mr. Burnaby has mentioned. And here"—Sir John paused and puffed thoughtfully at his cigarette—"is the first high light.

"To begin with, of course, Morton hated Bewsher and all he represented, hated him in a way that only a boy of his nature can; and then, one day—I don't know exactly when it could have been, probably a year or two after he had gone up to school—he began to see quite clearly what this hate meant; began to see that for such as he to hate the Bewshers of the world was the sheerest folly—a luxury far beyond his means. Quaint, wasn't it? In a boy of his age! You can imagine him working it out at night, in his narrow dormitory bed, when the other boys were asleep. You see, he realized, dimly at first, clearly at last, that through Bewsher and his kind lay the hope of Morton and his kind. Nice little boys think the same thing, only they are trained not to admit it. That was the first big moment of Morton's life, and with the determination characteristic of him he set out to accomplish what he had decided. In England we make our future through our friends, in this country you make it through your enemies. But it wasn't easy for Morton; such tasks never are. He had a good many insults to

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swallow. In the end, however, from being tolerated he came to be indispensable, and from being indispensable eventually to be liked. He had planned his campaign with care. Carefulness, recklessly carried out, has been, I think, the guiding rule of his life. He had modelled himself on Bewsher; he walked like Bewsher; tried to think like Bewsher—that is, in the less important things of life—and, with the divination that marks his type of man, the little money he had, the little money that as a schoolboy he could borrow, he had spent with precision on clothes and other things that brought him personal distinction; in what people call necessities he starved himself. By the time he was ready to leave school you could hardly have told him from the man he had set out to follow: he was equally well-mannered; equally at his ease; if anything, more conscious of prerogative than Bewsher. He had come to spend most of his holidays at Bewsher's great old house in Gloucestershire. That, too, was an illumination. It showed him what money was made for—the sunny quiet of the place, the wheels of a spacious living that ran so smoothly, the long gardens, the inevitableness of it all. Some day, he told himself, he would have just such a house. He has. It is his mistress. The world has not

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allowed him much of the poetry that, as you must already see, the man has in him; he takes it out on his place.

“It was in Morton’s last year at Oxford, just before his graduation, that the second great moment of his life occurred. He had done well at his college, not a poor college either; and all the while, you must remember, he was borrowing money and running up bills. But this didn’t bother him. He was perfectly assured in his own mind concerning his future. He had counted costs. In that May, Bewsher, who from school had gone to Sandhurst, came up on a visit with two or three other fledgling officers, and they had a dinner in Morton’s rooms. It turned into rather a ‘rag,’ as those things do, and it was there, across a flower-strewn, wine-stained table, that Morton had his second revelation. He wasn’t drunk—he never got drunk; the others were. The thing came in upon him slowly, warmingly, like the breeze that stirred the curtains. He felt himself, as never before, a man. You can see him sitting back in his chair, in the smoke and the noise and the foolish singing, cool, his eyes a little closed. He knew now that he had passed the level of these men; yes, even the shining mark Bewsher had set. He had gone on, while they

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had stood still. To him, he suddenly realized, and to such as he, belonged the heritage of the years, not to these men who thought they held it. These old gray buildings stretching away into the May dusk, the history of a thousand years, were his. These sprawled young aristocrats before him—they, whether they eventually came to know it or not, they and Bewsher with them—would one day do his bidding: come when he beckoned, go when he sent. It was a big thought, wasn't it, for a man of twenty-two?" Sir John paused and puffed at his cigarette.

"That was the second high light," he continued, "and the third did not come until fifteen years later. Bewsher went into the Indian army—his family had ideas of service—and Morton into a banking-house in London. And there, as deliberately as he had taken them up, he laid aside for the time being all the social perquisites which he had with so much pains acquired. Do you know—he told me that for fifteen years not once had he dined out, except when he thought his ambitions would be furthered by so doing, and then, as one turns on a tap, he turned on the charm he now knew himself to possess. It is not astonishing, is it, when you come to think of it, that eventually he became rich and famous?"

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Most people are unwilling to sacrifice their youth to their future. He wasn't. But it wasn't a happy time. He hated it. He paid off his debts, however, and at the end of the fifteen years found himself a big man in a small way, with every prospect of becoming a big man in a big way. Then, of course—such men do—he began to look about him. He wanted wider horizons, he wanted luxury, he wanted a wife; and he wanted them as a starved man wants food. He experienced comparatively little difficulty in getting started. Some of his school and university friends remembered him, and there was a whisper about that he was a man that bore watching. But afterward he stuck. The inner citadel of London is by no means as assailable as the outer fortifications lead one to suppose.

“They say a man never has a desire but there's an angel or a devil to write it down. Morton had hardly made his discovery when Bewsher turned up from India, transferred to a crack cavalry regiment; a sunburnt, cordial Bewsher, devilishly determined to enjoy the fulness of his prime. On his skirts, as he had done once before, Morton penetrated farther and farther into the esoteric heart of society. I'm not sure just how Bewsher felt toward Morton at the time; he

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liked him, I think; at all events, he had the habit of him. As for Morton, he liked Bewsher as much as he dared; he never permitted himself to like any one too much.

“I don’t know how it is with you, but I have noticed again and again that intimate friends are prone to fall in love with the same woman: perhaps it is because they have so many tastes in common; perhaps it is jealousy—I don’t know. Anyhow, that is what happened to these two, Morton first, then Bewsher; and it is characteristic that the former mentioned it to no one, while the latter was confidential and expansive. Such men do not deserve women, and yet they are often the very men women fall most in love with. At first the girl had been attracted to Morton, it seems; he intrigued her—no doubt the sense of power about him; but the handsomer man, when he entered the running, speedily drew ahead. You can imagine the effect of this upon her earlier suitor. It was the first rebuff that for a long time had occurred to him in his ordered plan of life. He resented it and turned it over in his mind, and eventually, as it always does to men of his kind, his opportunity came. You see, unlike Bewsher and his class, all his days had been an exercise in the recognition and appreciation of

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chances. He isolated the inevitable fly in the ointment, and in this particular ointment the fly happened to be Bewsher's lack of money and the education the girl had received. She was poor in the way that only the daughter of a great house can be. To Morton, once he was aware of the fly, and once he had combined the knowledge of it with what these two people most lacked, it was a simple thing. They lacked, as you have already guessed, courage and directness. On Morton's side was all the dunderheadism of an aristocracy, all its romanticism, all its gross materialism, all its confusion of ideals. But you mustn't think that he, Morton, was cold or objective in all this: far from it; he was desperately in love with the girl himself, and he was playing his game like a man in a corner—all his wits about him, but fever in his heart.

“There was the situation, an old one—a girl who dare not marry a poor man, and a poor man cracking his brains to know where to get money from. I dare say Bewsher never questioned the rightness of it all—he was too much in love with the girl, his own training had been too similar. And Morton, hovering on the outskirts, talked—to weak people the most fatal doctrine in the world—the doctrine of power, the doctrine that

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each man and woman can have just what they want if they will only get out and seek it. That's true for the big people; for the small it usually spells death. They falter on methods. They are too afraid of unimportant details. His insistence had its results even more speedily than he had hoped. Before long the girl, too, was urging Bewsher on to effort. It isn't the first time goodness has sent weakness to the devil. Meanwhile the instigator dropped from his one-time position of tentative lover to that of adviser in particular. It was just the position that at the time he most desired.

"Things came to a head on a warm night in April. Bewsher dropped in upon Morton in his chambers. Very handsome he looked, too, I dare say, in his evening clothes, with an opera-coat thrown back from his shoulders. I remember well myself his grand air, with a touch of cavalry swagger about it. I've no doubt he leaned against the chimneypiece and tapped his leg with his stick. And the upshot of it was that he wanted money. 'Oh, no! not a loan. It wasn't as bad as that. He had enough to screw along with himself; although he was frightfully in debt. He wanted a big sum. An income. To make money, that was. He didn't want to go into business if

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he could help it; hadn't any ability that way; hated it. But perhaps Morton could put him in the way of something? He didn't mind chances.'

"Do you see?" Sir John leaned forward. "And he never realized the vulgarity of it—that product of five centuries, that English gentleman. Never realized the vulgarity of demanding of life something for nothing; of asking from a man as a free gift what that man had sweated for and starved for all his life; yes, literally, all his life. It was an illumination, as Morton said, upon that pitiful thing we call 'class.' He demanded all this as his right, too; demanded power, the one precious possession. Well, the other man had his code as well, and the first paragraph in it was that a man shall get only what he works for. Can you imagine him, the little ugly man, sitting at his table and thinking all this? And suddenly he got to his feet. 'Yes,' he said, 'I'll make you a rich man.' But he didn't say he would keep him one. That was the third high light—the little man standing where all through the ages had stood men like him, the secret movers of the world, while before them, supplicating, had passed the beauty and the pride of their times. In the end they all beg at the feet of power—the kings and the fighting men. And yet, although this

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was the great, hidden triumph of his life, and, moreover, beyond his hopes a realization of the game he had been playing—for it put Bewsher, you see, utterly in his power—Morton said at the moment it made him a little sick. It was too crude; Bewsher's request too unashamed; it made suddenly too cheap, since men could ask for it so lightly, all the stakes for which he, Morton, had sacrificed the slow minutes and hours of his life. And then, of course, there was this as well: Bewsher had been to Morton an ideal, and ideals can't die, even the memory of them, without some pain."

Mrs. Malcolm, watching with lips a little parted, said to herself: "He has uncoiled too much."

"Yes"—Sir John reached out his hand and, picking up a long-stemmed rose from the table, began idly to twist it in his fingers. "And that was the end. From then on the matter was simple. It was like a duel between a trained swordsman and a novice; only it wasn't really a duel at all, for one of the antagonists was unaware that he was fighting. I suppose that most people would call it unfair. I have wondered. And yet Bewsher, in a polo game, or in the game of social life, would not have hesitated to use all the skill

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and craft he knew. But, you say, he would not have played against beginners. Well, he had asked himself into this game; he had not been invited. And so, all through that spring and into the summer and autumn the three-cornered contest went on, and into the winter and on to the spring beyond. Unwittingly, the girl was playing more surely than ever into Morton's hand. The increasing number of Bewsher's platitudes about wealth, about keeping up tradition, about religion, showed that. He even talked vaguely about giving up the army and going into business. 'It must have its fascinations, you know,' he remarked lightly. In the eyes of both of them Morton had become a sort of fairy godfather—a mysterious, wonderful gnome at whose beck gold leaped from the mountainside. It was just the illusion he wished to create. In the final analysis the figure of the gnome is the most beloved figure in the rotten class to which we belong.

"And then, just as spontaneously as it had come, Bewsher's money began to melt away—slowly at first; faster afterward until, finally, he was back again to his original income. This was a time of stress, of hurried consultations, of sympathy on the part of Morton, of some rather ugly funk on the part of Bewsher; and Morton realized

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that in the eyes of the girl he was rapidly becoming once more the dominant figure. It didn't do him much good”—Sir John broke the stem of the rose between his fingers.

“Soon there was an end to it all. There came, finally, a very unpleasant evening. This, too, was in April; April a year after Bewsher's visit to Morton's chambers, only this time the scene was laid in an office. Bewsher had put a check on the desk. ‘Here,’ he said, ‘that will tide me over until I can get on my feet,’ and his voice was curiously thick; and Morton, looking down, had seen that the signature wasn't genuine—a clumsy business done by a clumsy man—and, despite all his training, from what he said, a little cold shiver had run up and down his back. This had gone farther than he had planned. But he made no remark, simply pocketed the check, and the next day settled out of his own pockets Bewsher's sorry affairs; put him back, that is, where he had started, with a small income mortgaged beyond hope. Then he sent a note to the girl requesting an interview on urgent business. She saw him that night in her drawing-room. She was very lovely. Morton was all friendly sympathy. It wasn't altogether unreal, either. I think, from what he told me, he was genuinely touched. But

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he felt, you know—the urge, the goad, of his own career. His kind does. Ultimately they are not their own masters. He showed the girl the check—not at first, you understand, but delicately, after preliminary discussion; reluctantly, upon repeated urging. ‘What was he to do? What would she advise? Bewsher was safe, of course; he had seen to that; but the whole unintelligible, shocking aspect of the thing!’ He tore the check up and threw it in the fire. He was not unaware that the girl’s eyes admired him. It was a warm night. He said good-by, and walked home along the deserted street. He remembered, he told me, how sweet the trees smelled. He was not happy. You see, Bewsher had been the nearest approach to a friend he had ever had.

“That practically finished the sordid business. What the girl said to Bewsher Morton never knew; he trusted to her conventionalized religion and her family pride to break Bewsher’s heart, and to Bewsher’s sentimentality to eliminate him forever from the scene. In both surmises he was correct; he was only not aware that at the same time the girl had broken her own heart. He found that out afterward. And Bewsher eliminated himself more thoroughly than necessary. I suppose the shame of the thing was to him like a

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blow to a thoroughbred, instead of an incentive, as it would have been to a man of coarser fibre. He went from bad to worse, resigned from his regiment, finally disappeared. Personally, I had hoped that he had begun again somewhere on the outskirts of the world. But he isn't that sort. There's not much of the Norman king to him except his nose. The girl married Morton. He gave her no time to recover from her gratitude. He felt very happy, he told me, the day of his wedding, very elated. It was one of those rare occasions when he felt that the world was a good place. Another high light, you see. And it was no mean thing, if you consider it, for a man such as he to marry the daughter of a peer, and at the same time to love her. He was not a gentleman, you understand, he could never be that—it was the one secret thing that always hurt him—no amount of brains, no amount of courage could make him what he wasn't; he never lied to himself as most men do; so he had acquired a habit of secretly triumphing over those who possessed the gift. The other thing that hurt him was when, a few months later, he discovered that his wife still loved Bewsher and always would. And that"—Sir John picked up the broken rose again—"is, I suppose, the end of the story."

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There was a moment's silence and then Burnaby lifted his pointed chin. "By George!" he said, "it *is* interesting to know how things really happen, isn't it? But I think—you have, haven't you, left out the real point? Do you—would you mind telling just why you imagine Morton did this thing? Told his secret before all those people? It wasn't like him, was it?"

Sir John slowly lighted another cigarette, and then he turned to Burnaby and smiled. "Yes," he said, "it was extremely like him. Still, it's very clever of you, very clever. Can't you guess? It isn't so very difficult."

"No," said Burnaby, "I can't guess at all."

"Well, then, listen." And to Mrs. Malcolm it seemed as if Sir John had grown larger, had merged in the shadows about him; at least he gave that impression, for he sat up very straight and threw back his shoulders. For a moment he hesitated, then he began. "You must go back to the dinner I was describing," he said—"the dinner in London. I, too, was intrigued as you are, and when it was over I followed Morton out and walked with him toward his club. And, like you, I asked the question. I think that he had known all along that I suspected; at all events, it is characteristic of the man that he did not try to bluff

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me. He walked on for a little while in silence, and then he laughed abruptly. 'Yes,' he said, 'I'll tell you. Yes. Just this. What there is to be got, I've got; what work can win I've won; but back of it all there's something else, and back even of that there's a careless god who gives his gifts where they are least deserved. That's one reason why I talked as I did to-night. To all of us—the men like me—there comes in the end a time when we realize that what a man can do we can do, but that love, the touch of other people's minds, these two things are the gifts of the careless god. And it irritates us, I suppose, irritates us! We want them in a way that the ordinary man who has them cannot understand. We want them as damned souls in hell want water. And sometimes the strain's too much. It was to-night. To touch other minds, even for a moment, even if they hate you while you are doing it, that's the thing! To lay yourself, just once, bare to the gaze of ordinary people! With the hope, perhaps, that even then they may still find in you something to admire or love. Self-revelation! Every man confesses some time. It happened that I chose a dinner-party. Do you understand?'" It was almost as if Sir John himself had asked the question.

A Cup of Tea

“And then”—he was speaking in his usual calm tones again—“there happened a curious thing, a very curious thing, for Morton stopped and turned toward me and began to laugh. I thought he would never stop. It was rather uncanny, under the street-lamp there, this usually rather quiet man. ‘And that,’ he said at length, ‘that’s only half the story. The cream of it is this: the way I myself felt, sitting there among all those soft, easily lived people. That’s the cream of it. To flout them, to sting them, to laugh at them, to know you had more courage than all of them put together, you who were once so afraid of them! To feel that—even if they knew it was about yourself you were talking—that even then they were afraid of you, and would to-morrow ask you back again to their houses. That’s power! That’s worth doing! After all, you can keep your love and your sympathy and your gentlemen; it’s only to men like me, men who’ve sweated and come up, that moments arise such as I’ve had to-night.’ And then, ‘It’s rather a pity,’ he said, after a pause, ‘that of them all you alone knew of whom I was talking. Rather a pity, isn’t it?’” Sir John hesitated and looked about the table. “It was unusual, wasn’t it?” he said at length gently. “Have I been too dramatic?”

A Cup of Tea

In the little silence that followed, Mrs. Malcolm leaned forward, her eyes starry. "I would rather," she said, "talk to Bewsher in his teepee than talk to Morton with all his money."

Sir John looked at her and smiled—his charming smile. "Oh, no, you wouldn't," he said. "Oh, no! We say those things, but we don't mean them. If you sat next to Morton at dinner you'd like him; but as for Bewsher you'd despise him, as all right-minded women despise a failure. Oh, no; you'd prefer Morton."

"Perhaps you're right," sighed Mrs. Malcolm; "pirates are fascinating, I suppose." She arose to her feet. Out of the shadows Lady Masters advanced to meet her. "She *is* like a mist," thought Mrs. Malcolm. "Exactly like a rather faint mist."

Burnaby leaned over and lit a cigarette at one of the candles. "And, of course," he said quietly, without raising his head, "the curious thing is that this fellow Morton, despite all his talk of power, in the end is merely a ghost of Bewsher, after all, isn't he?"

Sir John turned and looked at the bowed sleek head with a puzzled expression. "A ghost!" he murmured. "I don't think I quite understand."

"It's very simple," said Burnaby, and raised

A Cup of Tea

his head. "Despite all Morton has done, in the things worth while, in the things he wants the most, he can at best be only a shadow of the shadow Bewsher has left—a shadow of a man to the woman who loves Bewsher, a shadow of a friend to the men who liked Bewsher, a shadow of a gentleman to the gentlemen about him. A ghost, in other words. It's the inevitable end of all selfishness. I think Bewsher has rather the best of it, don't you?"

"I—I had never thought of it in quite that light," said Sir John, and followed Mrs. Malcolm.

They went into the drawing-room beyond—across a hallway, and up a half-flight of stairs, and through glass doors. "Play for us!" said Mrs. Malcolm, and Burnaby, that remarkable young man, sat down to the piano and for perhaps an hour made the chords sob to a strange music, mostly his own.

"That's Bewsher!" he said when he was through, and had sat back on his stool, and was sipping a long-neglected cordial.

"B-r-r-r!" shivered Mrs. Selden from her place by the fire. "How unpleasant you are!"

Sir John looked troubled. "I hope," he said, "my story hasn't depressed you too much. Bur-

A Cup of Tea

naby's was really worse, you know. Well, I must be going." He turned to Mrs. Malcolm. "You are one of the few women who can make me sit up late."

He bade each in turn good night in his suave, charming, slightly Hebraic manner. To Burnaby he said: "Thank you for the music. Improvisation is perhaps the happiest of gifts."

But Burnaby for once was awkward. He was watching Sir John's face with the curious, intent look of a forest animal that so often possessed his long, dark eyes. Suddenly he remembered himself. "Oh, yes," he said hastily. "I beg your pardon. Thanks, very much."

"Good night!" Sir John and Lady Masters passed through the glass doors.

Burnaby paused a moment where he had shaken hands, and then, with the long stride characteristic of him, went to the window, and, drawing aside the curtain, peered into the darkness beyond. He stood listening until the purr of a great motor rose and died on the snow-muffled air. "He's gone," he said, and turned back into the room. He spread his arms out and dropped them to his sides. "Swastika!" he said. "And God keep us from the evil eye!"

"What do you mean?" asked Mrs. Malcolm.

A Cup of Tea

"Sir John," said Burnaby. "He has 'a bad heart.'"

"Stop talking your Indian talk and tell us what you mean."

Burnaby balanced himself on the hearth. "Am I to understand you don't know?" he asked. "Well, Morton's Masters, and 'the girl's' Lady Masters, and Bewsher—well, he's just a squaw-man."

"I don't believe it!" said Mrs. Malcolm. "He wouldn't dare."

"Wouldn't dare?" Burnaby laughed shortly. "My dear Minna, he'd dare anything if it gave him a sense of power."

"But why—why did he choose us? We're not so important as all that?"

"Because—well, Bewsher's name came up. Because, well, you heard what he said—self-revelation—men who had sweated. Because"—suddenly Burnaby took a step forward and his jaw shot out—"because that shadow of his, that wife of his, broke a champagne-glass when I said Geoffrey Boisselier Bewsher; broke her champagne-glass and, I've no doubt, cried out loud in her heart. Power can't buy love—no; but power can stamp to death anything that won't love it. That's Masters. I can tell a timber-wolf far off.

A Cup of Tea

Can you see him now in his motor? He'll have turned the lights out, and she—his wife—will be looking out of the window at the snow? All you can see of him would be his nose and his beard and the glow of his cigar—except his smile. You could see that when the car passed a corner lamp, couldn't you?"

"I don't believe it yet," said Mrs. Malcolm.
"It's too preposterous."

CLOSED DOORS



CLOSED DOORS

HARDY told the story of "the wolf" because Mrs. Roland in her clever, carefully put together voice had settled once more the ancient question of right and wrong. Black was black, you see, and white was white. The luckless couple she had been describing might—but they were very fortunate if they got it—expect sympathy possibly, but certainly not condonation. People were free agents. Nowadays we were inclining much too much to overlook attacks upon the social order. Our moral fibre was slackening. One made his or her own bed, and—well, that was all right, provided afterward there was entire willingness to lie in it. No kicking, you understand; nor any expectation of intelligent people being infinitely forgiving. And there you are! Exactly! There you are.

There had been about this a little fierceness, a little overinsistency. One looks for it when clever women annunciate the simplicity of the moral code. They know better. One has always a sense of an attempt at self-conviction.

In the shadows of the background Callender

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stirred uneasily. "Oh, of course," he interjected in his thick, tired voice; "of course! It's all true—perfectly; what you've been saying; but—" He trailed off into confusion. "Damn these double beds, anyhow! There're too many of 'em."

Then Hardy leaned forward. I had known that he would lean forward. There are times when Hardy is bound to lean forward. Under his calm, spare, brown exterior he nurses passions, and perhaps the most fierce of them all is a hatred for the average judgment of the world.

"It's a wonder to me," he said, "how well people get on under the circumstances. We're all of us living in a world much too big and complex for the best of us. We're like peas shaken in a giant hopper; and we don't know why we're shaken." He paused and lit a cigarette. Behind the orange flame of the match you had a sudden glimpse of lean, firm-textured cheek and gray, narrow eyes. Then there was darkness again. For a moment no one spoke, and Hardy asked abruptly: "Do any of you happen to remember John Murray and Eloise Foster—Alec Foster's wife?"

About the question was a curious whip-lash quality, and you realized immediately that al-

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though you did not know John Murray and Eloise Foster—had never heard of them, in fact—some of the others did; remembered them, that is, poignantly, for there fell another silence—this time a silence in which you suddenly became acutely aware of your surroundings; of the white shirt-fronts of the men, forming, in the soft darkness, a circle of etiolation like century-plants in the dusk of a garden; of the firefly ends of cigarettes and cigars. Far away to the south a hanging of gold across the sky indicated the city; and in the valley below the lights of a suburb twinkled through the trees. Pressing in upon the vine-covered porch was the smell of July, sweet and heavy; and the continuous, strident chirruping of insects seemed for a moment to monopolize all sound. It was as if instantaneously a picture of John Murray and Eloise Foster had been flashed upon a screen—one was so vividly aware of their presence in the minds of some of those listening to Hardy.

Callender broke the spell. He stirred uneasily. You heard his rattan chair creaking under his heavy body. He made a curious sound with his lips. "Good Lord, yes!" he murmured.

"I saw them a year ago," said Hardy.
"You did! Where?"

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“In Wyoming.”

From his dark corner Roland spoke precisely. His words sounded like dollars being counted. “Is that that fellow, that painter, that ran away with Alec Foster’s wife about fifteen years ago?” he asked.

Hardy answered with equal grimness. “Yes,” he said, “it was that fellow Murray—that painter.” His lighted cigarette described a circle in the darkness, and I realized that he had made the peculiar gesture with which, as a rule, he precedes narration—rare narration, for he is not much given to story-telling—a gesture as if out of the air he was gathering together memory with his fingers.

“You remember John Murray in New York, don’t you, Helen?” he began. “I do, especially, because, perhaps you recollect, I knew him intimately; as intimately, that is, as any one knew him. He happened to be the one bright spot in the dreary five years of office work that followed my graduation from college. You see, I was at the age when I hungered for color and didn’t know how to go about getting it. Most young men are that way. Then I met Murray. It was at a reception given by a distant cousin of mine. I can see him now, standing before an open fire-

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place, balancing a cup of tea in one hand and talking with extreme dexterity to three women at once, and I am perfectly sure that each one of them thought he was wishing the other two were not there. He had to a supreme degree the peculiar gift of complimenting by his manner even the dullest person to whom he talked.” Hardy interrupted himself. “You remember that trait, don’t you?” he asked.

Mrs. Roland answered. “Yes,” she said.

“It was an odd trait,” continued Hardy thoughtfully, “when you consider what Murray really was; he was, you see, in reality the most impersonal man I have ever known. I put this down at first to the aloofness of genius, but afterward—well, you will understand. At all events, he made no such impression upon me that afternoon. I realized only the apparent, and to me unaccustomed, interest he took in my personality and the charm of the man’s face and figure: his tall, lithe figure; his black, close-cropped, curly hair; his black, amused eyes. It wasn’t until much later that I perceived the faun-like quality other people complained of; the curious, darting elusiveness. And, of course, I refused to believe it long after I knew it was true. He was—I wish I could make him clear to you—so oddly not-to-

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be-pinned-down to anything; so oddly obstinate about refusing to live up to expectations; in the end, so cold about life. There were dozens of little outward signs. His fingers were always limp, I remember, although he shook hands so eagerly. And there was about him the queerest kind of a blurred quality. At a distance, you understand, he seemed clean-cut, extremely so, but as you came closer there grew a mistiness, a mobile lack of precision, that eventually made you aware only of the eyes I have mentioned: amused, and quick, and black, with little wine-color lights in them. And yet in countless ways he was so sweet and kind and humorous.

“I remember that first afternoon an incident which at the time made little impression upon me, but which, in the light of subsequent knowledge, was sinister. There was a small blonde girl talking to Murray when I went back to where he was, and she moved away, but not before I had noticed an unmistakable look in her eyes. As for Murray, he was bored. He took no great pains to conceal it.”

Hardy paused long enough to throw away his cigarette. “Of course,” he resumed in a dry voice, “I am not contending that every time a man has the misfortune to be the object of an

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unreciprocated passion it is his duty to propose marriage. That Victorian ideal, I believe, has gone out of fashion. But there's a difference. I don't think we've yet reached the point where such things can be done for amusement, or to gratify a taste for amateur psychology. And Murray, I am afraid, rather enjoyed illuminations. He was a lighter of bonfires he had no intention of tending. He was something like a cold, sweet wind—if the figure is not too exaggerated—blowing tinder into flame.

“All these things were not clear to me at once, you understand; they came to me gradually, after I had known Murray some time. And with them came another sense of disturbance, all very confused—a haunting discomfiture. Briefly, Murray should have been on his way to being a great painter; briefly, he wasn’t. There was no use blinking the fact. Even my ignorant and loyal eyes told me that. But what was holding him back? Admitting all he had against him—too much money, too much love of gayety, too large a flock of adoring women—there was still no adequate reason that I could find. It wasn’t until the end of those five years that I laid my finger on the scar; then it was laid for me by Hewitt—Hewitt, who was old and wise, and who, occasion-

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ally, painted a beautiful thing. 'The fault lies in the boy's character,' he spluttered. 'How the devil can you paint a portrait when you can't get inside, and don't want to get inside, your subject's mind? When you don't know what getting inside a mind is? Sense of beauty? Oh, yes, he's got a marvellous sense of beauty; but you can't even paint a great landscape unless you have a perception of humanity. In the end, as in everything else, you've got to know the taste of blood and smell of sweat. I'm talking about great stuff, not even fairly good stuff; and, mark my words, the former is the only kind young Murray will ever be satisfied to paint. If he doesn't come through he'll kill himself. I know him. And how the deuce can he come through?'

"That was at luncheon at a club, and I recollect how depressed I was. It was a snowy February day, and after Hewitt had gone I went to one of the windows and peered down into the muddy desolation of the street. I knew that what he had said was true. Here, after all my twistings and turnings, I was face to face with a fact. None the less, late that afternoon I went up to Murray's studio. By that time my mind was a little bit more at peace; at all events, I found myself needing desperately Murray's laugh, his

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quick, amused eyes, the warm beauty of his rooms, the reassuring smell of paint. It was a coincidence, wasn't it, that I should have met Eloise Foster there that very day?

"I shan't forget it. The room was dark when I came in, but a lamp was burning on a table beside a screen, over which had been flung a gorgeous vestment of cloth of gold. Standing before the screen was Eloise Foster. At first she terrified me a little, she was so bright and arresting. I wasn't used to women. A tall, slim, coming-toward-you sort of person she was, with boyish bronze hair parted at one side and smiling lips. I delighted in her laugh and her gestures. But I must confess this first impression suffered a slight reaction when later on we sat down to tea. It was rather like meeting the mystery of a lantern at night, and then, immediately afterward, hearing the matter-of-fact voice behind it. At that time I am sure—I am very sure—Eloise Foster was rather an ordinary sort of woman. Indeed, I am not at all sure she isn't a very ordinary sort of woman to-day. Perhaps that's the thing about her—she is so ordinary as to be exceptional. We don't grow ordinary women any more. Primitive impulses are carefully restrained. It isn't the fashion to act like bursting dams; emotions are

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run into strongly banked irrigation ditches. And Eloise Foster, you see, did give one the impression of a dam—a well-groomed dam. But that first afternoon the conversation was more than normal—it was subnormal, as most 'smart' conversation is. At that time the Fosters lived at Long Slip, and the talk was almost entirely about the inner life of that spiritual community.

"That was in February, and during the winter I met Mrs. Foster several times at Murray's, but it was not until a certain night in spring that I ever talked to her alone. We had had tea, and I walked with her through the growing night to the house of a friend with whom she was staying. It was a very fragrant night; we didn't say much until we had gone a block or two, then she turned to me abruptly.

"'You're a great friend of John Murray's, aren't you?' she asked.

"I assured her I was.

"'Does he ever worry you?'

"My heart gave a little jump, but I pretended not to understand what she meant.

"'He seems to me,' she said—'he seems to me rather like a man dying standing up—inch by inch.'

"I was astonished. I had never before sus-

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pected this typical product of Long Slip of any seriousness or any capability of feeling. She had seemed to me merely the most attractive addition to Murray's adulatory dove-cote. Her next speech had the curious logical disconnectedness of the direct feminine mind.

“‘I wish,’ she said, a little breathlessly, ‘I wish he would fall in love with some one—forget himself. But he can’t. That’s his trouble. He ought to be such a great man. If he could only lay his hands on something!’

“We came to the house where she was staying and went up the steps. As the door was opened she turned and smiled at me—a very radiant, proudly beautiful sort of person. I wasn’t to see her again for fourteen years. Within two weeks she and Murray ran away together.”

In the silence that followed Callender again made the odd little whispering sound with his lips.

“Yes,” said Hardy, out of the darkness, “you remember her too, don’t you?”

He lit another cigarette. “Do any of you by any chance know central southern Wyoming?” he asked. “Well, it’s a good deal of a desert—yellow and red buttes and stunted cactus; all of it under a sky of piercing blueness. Every now and then there’s a water-hole, or a valley opening

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up unexpectedly out of the dead monotony. A year ago last August I dropped into one of these—one of these valleys. It was dusk. I had been five days coming from Idaho. I was all alone—just a couple of pack-horses. At a God-forsaken little town fifteen miles back they had told me there was a ranch ahead of me where I could spend the night. And then, here it was. The road dipped suddenly and twisted through a sand-bank, and at the end of the twist I found myself looking down into a bowl of green fields through which ran a shining river. As I looked, a yellow light broke out from a clump of cottonwoods, and then another, and I traced between the foliage the outline of a long, low ranch-house. The smell of dampness and the smell of grass came up to meet me. It was like wine. My mouth was dry with alkali. The country through which I had come had been even more desolate than usual, for there had been a drought; no rain for a month. The dust was ankle-deep on a horse. The road followed down another bench. At the bottom I found a gate; then some corrals, to one side of which were out-buildings and saddle-sheds. As I led my horses toward the latter a woman came out of a near-by cabin—a woman dressed in white—and started

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toward the main ranch-house. She did not see me at all, but, at the sound of my voice, turned, hesitated, and came toward me. She walked very slowly. One had the impression of a picture slowly emerging from the black and gray of a negative. When she was within a foot or two of me she stopped. She was the quietest, slowest-moving woman I had seen in a long time. You notice gestures, mental or physical, with extraordinary quickness and accuracy in a lonely country. The woman was Eloise Foster."

Hardy fell silent for a moment, and then again described the curious circle with the end of his lighted cigarette—the circle as if he was gathering with his fingers memory out of the air. "One gets used to coincidence after a while," he proceeded. "One comes to the conclusion that life is almost entirely a matter of coincidence. Astonishment is replaced by an attitude toward fate of 'I told you so.' At the back of my brain I had always thought that somewhere, some day, I should again see John Murray and the woman he had run away with. I had even imagined that I might meet them under some such circumstances as I did. There were rumors of their being West. But I was not prepared for Eloise Foster's first words:

"'Oh!' she said. 'So it's you!'

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“Wasn’t it odd? Nothing else: no word of greeting, no laugh. Nor did we speak while I was taking my saddles off and turning my horses in to pasture. Afterward I walked beside her to the house.

“We came to a grove of trees, and a courtyard and a well; beyond, silhouetted against a sky of deep yellow, was the outline of a large T-shaped log house. A window or two was lighted. We were facing the end of the T.

“Then, for the first time since her opening words, my companion spoke again. She looked at the sky. ‘Another hot day to-morrow,’ she said. ‘It’s bad. The river is shrinking to nothing.’ Perhaps my nerves were beginning to be already a little on edge, but the remark seemed to me to have about it portentousness, more portentousness than even the usual remark of a person close to the soil and the weather. I was beginning to look and listen; this was a strange place to which I had come and my old acquaintance had turned into a strange woman.

“We pushed open a door. It opened into a long passageway that ran straight through the house. To one side was a square frame hung with a heavy curtain. Eloise lifted this and I found myself in a great log living-room. It was

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astonishingly beautiful. On the floor were heavy rugs, and the walls, ruddy wine-colored in places where the light from a couple of lamps struck them, were hung with skins. Here and there were even a few landscapes, framed in a dark wood to suit the background. One was aware of luxury and careful living. My hostess made a gesture toward a great, high-backed bench before the empty fireplace. ‘Sit down,’ she said. ‘I’ll tell John.’ I heard her go. For a minute I was alone in the mellow quiet of the room; then there was a step, and a voice said—it was Murray’s voice, but with a note in it I had never before heard—a high, whining note, an apologetic note, a note that suddenly made me sit very still—‘If you don’t mind I don’t think I’ll go in to supper, Eloise. I’m awfully tired. I—’ and it trailed off into silence as the curtain stirred, and I heard the *swish* of Eloise’s skirt.

“Her answer was as strange as the curious appeal. ‘Yes,’ she said, ‘you will—you will go in to supper,’ and her words had a precise, commanding quality. ‘Besides, here’s an old friend of ours, Mr. Hardy.’

“‘Who?’ asked Murray.

“‘Hardy! Jim Hardy!’

“I had the topsyturvy impression of being be-

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hind the scenes of a play. I got up from my bench. Standing near a lamp was Murray. For a moment he hesitated vaguely and then came toward me, and I cannot tell you with what relief I saw flash to the surface the same ready smile, the old darting quickness, I remembered so well. It was as if some aura of evil had been dispelled. And in a flash of intuition the truth of the situation—what I thought was the truth—came to me. Of course, a woman of Eloise Foster's training—or lack of training—was unhappy stripped of all the things that seemed to her worth while. I pitied Murray; I patted his shoulder affectionately; I looked him over closely. He was very thin, and he stooped, and his hair, much too long, was streaked with gray, and his face, under its sunburn, was haggard; but at least he was human and hospitable, and the woman beside him had been neither of these things.

"I went to my room to wash—it opened on the long hall and was, like the living-room, surprisingly beautiful and luxurious—resenting Eloise Foster, and I went in to supper with my resentment growing upon me. Supper proved no particularly agreeable meal. Eloise and Murray attempted an interest in New York—in people they had not seen in years—but the interest was evidently not very acute. The conversation lan-

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guished. I experienced the feeling of disappointment that usually follows the seeing of old friends after a long lapse of time. There were six or seven others at table: ranch-hands, and an older man who was evidently a foreman. I noticed they treated Murray with the kindly contempt Westerners show toward those for whose opinion they have little respect. There was talk in brief sentences of sheep; of the drought; the older man was ominous. It seemed there was 'no water in the moon.' He inferred calamity if the river went dry. One of the younger men was more optimistic. 'The river never had gone dry.' 'Had he noticed how all the fish were gathering in a few pools? No? Well, that meant something. A fellow from the Lazy Z outfit over in the sand-hills claimed to have seen a mad coyote—hydrophobia.' The optimist offered to fight any coyote, mad or otherwise, with bare hands. I remember the other's words. 'Smart!' he said grimly. 'A smart young fellow! And never left the country either! Wonderful, I calls it.' He fixed a baleful eye on the offender. 'Son,' he said, 'don't you go fightin' no mad coyotes; I seen them in Texas in the 'eighties. They ain't got enough sense left to run— Jes' plumb full o' hell and courage.'

"In the silence that followed you noticed the

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wind, the wind that had been blowing with fitful steadiness for over a week. It poured into the room in hot, arid gusts. I hate wind. Most people—cow-punchers, sailors—who see much of wind dislike it. It is bad for the nerves; it is always prophetic. I had lived with this wind ever since I had left Idaho; at night it was peculiarly noticeable, and back of its coming and going was an odd sense of persistency. You felt that it had no end. One of the men stirred irritably. 'Damn!' he muttered, and got up and closed the windows. The room became stifling. And then, suddenly—quite suddenly and unexpectedly—I saw something that left me wondering—I saw Murray's face.

"He had been silent a long while. He was sitting at the end of the table, his hands below the surface of the boards, but he had left the room. Do you see what I mean? The principal part of him was gone. There was a rigid, fairly polite body upright in his chair, but John Murray was somewhere else. And above the body was a mask with no trace of human designing about it; just a long, brown oval, with two burnt-out coals where eyes should have been.

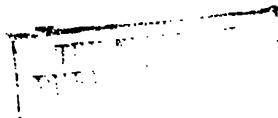
"We don't believe such things, do we?" Hardy puffed at his cigarette. "We insist upon reaffirm-



REIMBURSEMENT

“And then, suddenly, I saw something that left me wondering—
I saw Murray’s face.”

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ing that life is matter of fact, when, of course, we all know it isn't. I insisted upon it at the moment. I questioned my senses. Then I looked up again—what I had seen was true. I looked about the table; every one was eating placidly—every one, that is, but Eloise Foster; she was staring straight ahead of her, an expression on her face as if she was listening for a sound just beyond the reach of her ear. As for myself, I couldn't eat any more. In a little while we went into the living-room—Eloise, Murray, the foreman, and myself. The younger men, with evident relief, left for mysterious back-buildings. I found myself adjusting my first impressions. Here was something more than merely a woman weary of a bad bargain; than merely a man unhappy because the woman he loved was unsatisfied. I was very tired. I excused myself and went to my charmingly incongruous room. All night the wind whined about the house; I heard it every time I awoke. A queer, oppressive sense of mystery overwhelmed me like a vague, unpleasant dream.

“The next morning, of course, everything was different. It always is. The sun came up huge and hot, but for a little while, before its full rays struck the earth, there was coolness and the smell

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of grass and early mist. Breakfast, too, proved a pleasant meal. Even the old foreman was smiling in a silent way. I decided that I was getting old; that long journeys tired me more than I was aware. I was entirely restored to the commonplace. I felt a little silly about the night before."

Hardy paused. "I wish," he resumed, "I had followed my inclination and plan and had left the following morning. Had I done so I would have saved myself much emotion, and after one has knocked about the world a good deal one becomes a trifle weary of vicarious emotion. But I didn't leave. I couldn't. I told Eloise—Eloise Murray, for by this time I knew she and Murray had been married—of my intention that night. We were standing on the porch after supper. There was a round, hot moon risen over the skeleton whiteness of the benches to the east, and I could see my companion's face clearly. For a second she seemed lost in thought, and then, with a quick, fluttering gesture, she came toward me and put her hand on my arm. The dropping of her mask was as queer as the wearing of it. 'Don't go!' she whispered. Her lips twisted. 'Don't go!' she repeated. 'You see'—her voice broke in an odd little laugh—'you're the first human thing

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I've known—I've seen for years'; and she turned and fled into the house.

"I walked across a field to the little river. It lay in shining pools beneath the burning moon—languid, with no motion left to it. Pretty soon the wind would begin again—it had dropped for for an hour or two at sundown. My feeling of matter-of-factness had left me entirely.

"I won't go into the next three weeks. You must imagine for yourselves how the thing grew upon me—how the impression of unnaturalness, of secrets being whispered about me, finally took possession of me, until, in the end, I became as much a part of the drama as the principal actors themselves. It is necessary to have been isolated for a period with just a few people to grasp the psychology of this. I found myself on edge—listening for hints; spending my time trying to piece these hints into a logical whole. Save for that one break in her calm, Eloise Murray had never dropped her mask; save for stated and very obvious attempts to play the host, Murray was largely unaware of my existence. I was coming to the conclusion that here were two people playing at a game between themselves: a desperate game—at least, so it seemed to me in my more overwrought moments. And all the while I was watching this

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moral malady another malady was coming upon us, a malady much more definite—I mean the drought. I had forgotten its presence; it made itself finally visible like a great ghost with creaking, dust-colored wings.

“Have you ever seen drought—real drought?” Hardy’s voice took on a sudden rasping intonation. “Well, it’s what you think God would do to the whole world if ever he should lose his infallible sense of humor. It’s thirst personified, weariness made into your shadow. It follows you all day, and goes to bed with you at night, and gets up with you in the morning. Out of the desert came Mexicans with bands of sheep; the water-holes were gone. The ranch became a place of bawling animals, of incredible dust and stench; the little river, dwindling day by day, grew foul and green, and the banks down to it were broken by countless hoofs. At first it was like the rush backward of a fleeing population before an advancing army; there was much action, much planning, much talk of expedients; and then this fell away into the dour, hopeless silence with which men take the sardonicism of the universe. We sat down prepared to see this devil of wind and dust and heat out. In the end humanity is even more persistent than nature.

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“For a few days Murray seemed stirred from the queer trance in which he lived, but only for a few days; it was his wife who surprised me. She met the drought head up. It was she who took charge, who was everywhere superintending, who kept the men in hand when some of the less hardy wanted to flee down the valley toward the distant railway. I achieved for her a new respect, a respect that began to have in it some touch of old affection. She was a curious woman; I failed to understand her. Oddly enough—I had not seen it before—I suddenly found her beautiful. Not the beauty of fifteen years back, but a new beauty—a hard, spare, translucent beauty—the beauty a woman gets when she learns some of the distasteful lessons a man learns while he is still very young; the beauty of a sword. And then—quite by chance—I found out what was back of all this mystery; what was back of the masks that Murray and his wife wore. It was very simple.

“One afternoon I came in just before dusk from the corrals; I was tired and wanted to wash off some of the yellow dust that I had been drinking for the past three weeks. My hair and eyes and ears seemed irritatingly full of it. The doors at either end of the long passageway that ran through

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the house were open and the burning air of outside stirred in and out in portentous breaths. My room was opposite one that I knew Murray used as a study, although I had never been inside it. As I came in I noticed that the door of this room was slightly ajar. As I passed I suddenly heard again the high, whining voice, the voice with the apologetic, inhuman note in it I had heard the night of my arrival. I paused instantly. Perhaps I shouldn't have done so, but there are times, you know, when you do. 'Good God!' said the voice. 'Good God, yes! What do you think I am? What do you think I am made of?' Then there was silence, and then again the high, wailing voice. 'For God's sake,' it said, 'go away! Get out of here!' and the door opened and Eloise Murray came out. She was walking very rigidly, her head thrown back, two spots of color in her cheeks; her eyes were blank. I think she hardly noticed me, although as she went by her sleeve touched mine. But I had had a glimpse into the room; bending over a table was Murray, and he was pressing something into his bared arm."

Hardy paused. "Oh, yes," he said to the unspoken question, "it was drugs. I should have known before. I am very stupid about such

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things. I observe closely, but often my conclusions are dull. I am always surprised, for instance, when people tell me that women, whose complexions I think beautiful, paint. I never guess. Yes, it was drugs. Stupid, wasn't it? All that brain full of beauty; all that talent! And here I'd been thinking the usual gross inaccuracies about a woman ruining a man or a man ruining a woman.

"That night I spoke to Eloise about what I had seen. We were again on the porch, only this time under a sky of stars drooping from a roof of candalent purple. You see, the drought had brought us close together, although we had actually talked to each other very little. She listened in silence to my suggestions—stupid suggestions, I've no doubt—the suggestions of the average man: change of scene, doctors, sanatoriums. Then she spread out her arms. 'Do you suppose,' she said, 'that I've done none of these things? What is the end? Oh, dear God, what is the end? You've never known a thing of this kind, have you? It is the elusiveness of it; the intangibility. If there was only something one could take hold of! But there isn't. Not a thing. Listen! Once, just after we ran away, one of the few times he has ever spoken openly

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to me, John gave me a hint of this. I am not quite sure he was taking anything then; I am not quite sure when he began; but I remember that he spread his arms out as I am doing now. "If I could only grasp life!" he said. "If I could only get my head down to where my hands are, or raise my hands up to my head! If I could only feel just the human things and not merely the things that have been raised to a supreme degree!" And then he began talking about the immaterialism of sin. "Strangle it!" he said. "If a man could only strangle it! Those old saints who could fling an ink-pot at the devil were lucky." He laughed as he said it, and I laughed too. I didn't understand then; I was very happy; I thought I was going to make him a great man. But now I do—I understand, utterly.' She paused. 'And yet,' she continued, 'I am not sorry. No, I am not sorry. No woman is ever sorry for having been made awake.' She shook her head, and I saw she had reached the point where people can no longer speak. . . . Within the week the wolf came down out of the desert."

"The what?" asked Mrs. Roland sharply. Far off in the valley a train whistled twice; the night suddenly pressed in upon us again.

"The wolf," said Hardy casually. "A gaunt,

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mangy wolf, grayish-yellow like the country he had left. He came down one afternoon when I was smoking a cigarette in the shade of a saddle-house. There were two or three sheep-herders sprawled out beside me. Our conversation, as you can imagine, had been desultory. It was too piercingly hot to talk. It was a good deal of an effort even to lie on the ground. I happened to look up, and there, coming down a narrow trail that had been worn by the horses, was something that looked like a slowly moving bundle of sage-brush. It didn't interest me very much at first, but I called my companions' attention to it. 'A coyote,' I said lazily. One of the men was a Mexican and he studied the oncoming object carefully; I saw his eyes widen. 'Wolf!' he said suddenly. We continued to watch without excitement. It didn't seem to occur to any of us that, of all preposterous things in the world, nothing was more preposterous than the idea of a wolf trotting down a trail in full sight of men at four o'clock of an afternoon. There was a dip in the ground, and for a moment the gray bundle was lost to view, but almost immediately it appeared again, unhurried, undeviating, preoccupied. We gazed at it with calmly speculative eyes. Do you know—I think we were all a little crazy that

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last week of the drought? The trail from the lowest bench, past the corrals, was within ten feet of us, and before we knew it the thing was amongst us; no, not amongst us, but alongside of us; for it never turned its head as it went past. You felt that you could almost smell its breath. As it ran, a slobber of foam streaked its jaws and fell in a little fine spray on the dust. There was a horse tied to a hitching-rack; it gave a sudden snort, kicked, and backed into the creature at its heels. Almost without turning the wolf sank its teeth deep into the nearest fetlock, shook its head, and went on. I noticed then that all the horses in the corrals were fighting and squealing. The bitten horse screamed, and for the first time the monstrosity of the whole thing came home to us—the monstrous quiet, the monstrous lack of fear of this creature out of the wilds. One of the men jumped to his feet. 'Good God!' he said, and started toward the house at a run. We all followed him. The wolf was perhaps fifty feet ahead. He never paused, never looked back, never once slackened in his long, swinging gait. 'He'll be in the house in a minute!' some one beside me sobbed. 'Every door is open. Not a gun—not a gun on any of us.' We burst through the little grove of cottonwoods, and on the other

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side was a vision as strange as any of that mad afternoon, for standing in the door of the ranch-house was John Murray, waiting, his hands held out before him, the fingers extended and crooked; coming toward him was the wolf.

“Involuntarily we stopped. We didn’t shout. The affair seemed prearranged. And then for the first time the wolf swerved; without hesitation, merely sheering away, he swung off around the corner of the house. And John Murray swung after him.

“A confused time followed. It was all so queer, so incredible. Some of the men ran for horses, others for their Winchesters; I ran through the house and out the opposite side, and when I got there I saw John Murray on the edge of the bench, outlined against the blue of the sky; he was trotting, without weariness, without haste; thirty feet or so in front of him was the wolf.

“And that,” said Hardy, “is about the end of it. We followed Murray, of course. We found him and the wolf up a little draw. They were both dead; but Murray wasn’t much torn. He had strangled the thing with his hands. It doesn’t sound possible, but he had. I couldn’t quite make out Eloise. She was shocked, naturally—saddened; but back of it all was the flicker of an illu-

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mination—the illumination of a person who has come through a storm.”

“But good Lord!” said Callender. “Do you think— You don’t really think the wolf——?”

“I don’t think anything,” said Hardy. “I’ve seen too many queer things ever to interrogate; I merely record.”

“The whole affair, of course, is easily susceptible of explanation,” interjected Roland. “I’ve heard before of these mad wolves.”

“So have I,” agreed Hardy; “often. But I never before heard of a man knowing one was coming before he was told.”

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SOME men are like the twang of a bow-string. Hardy was like that—short, lithe, sunburned, vivid. Into the lives of Jerrick, Hill, and myself, old classmates of his, he came and went in the fashion of one of those queer winds that on a sultry day in summer blow unexpectedly up a city street out of nowhere. His comings excited us; his goings left us refreshed and a little vaguely discontented. So many people are gray. Hardy gave one a shock of color, as do the deserts and the mountains he inhabited. It was not particularly what he said—he didn't talk much—it was his appearance, his direct, a trifle fierce, gestures, the sense of mysterious lands that pervaded him. One never knew when he was coming to New York and one never knew how long he was going to stay; he just appeared, was very busy with mining companies for a while, sat about clubs in the late afternoon, and then, one day, he was gone.

Sometimes he came twice in a year; oftener, not for two or three years at a stretch. When he

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did come we gave him a dinner—that is, Jarrick, Hill, and myself. And it was rather an occasion. We would procure a table in the gayest restaurant we could find, near, but not too near, the music—Hill it was who first suggested this as a dramatic bit of incongruity between Hardy and the frequenters of Broadway—and the most exotic food obtainable, for, a good part of his time, Hardy, we knew, lived upon camp fare. Then we would try to make him tell about his experiences. Usually he wouldn't. Impersonally, he was entertaining about South Africa, about the Caucasus, about Alaska, Mexico, anywhere you care to think; but concretely he might have been an illustrated lecture for all he mentioned himself. He was passionately fond of abstract argument. "Y'see," he would explain, "I don't get half as much of this sort of thing as I want. Of course, one does run across remarkable people—now, I met a cow-puncher once who knew Keats by heart—but as a rule I deal only with material things, mines and prospects and assays and that sort of thing." Poor chap! I wonder if he thought that we, with out brokering and our writing and our lawyering, dealt much with ideas! I remember one night when we sat up until three discussing the philosophy of prohibition over

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three bottles of port. I wonder how many other men have done the same thing!

But five years ago—no, it was six—Hardy really told us a real story about himself. Necessarily the occasion is memorable in our recollections. We had dined at Lamb's, and the place was practically empty, for it was long after the theatre hour—only a drowsy waiter here and there, and away over in one corner a young couple who, I suppose, imagined themselves in love. Fancy being in love at Lamb's! We had been discussing, of all things in the world, bravery and conscience and cowardice and original sin, and that sort of business, and there was no question about it that Hardy was enjoying himself hugely. He was leaning upon the table, a coffee-cup between his relaxed brown hands, listening with an eagerness highly complimentary to the banal remarks we had to make upon the subject. "This is talk!" he ejaculated once with a laugh.

Hill, against the combined attack of Jarrick and myself, was maintaining the argument. "There is no such thing as instinctive bravery," he affirmed, for the fifth time at least, "amongst intelligent men. Every one of us is naturally a coward. Of course we are. The more imagination we've got the more we can realize how pleas-

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ant life is, after all, and how rotten the adjuncts of sudden death. It's reason that does the trick—reason and tradition. Do you know of any one who is brave when he is alone—except, that is, when it is a case of self-preservation? No! Of course not. Did you ever hear of any one choosing to go along a dangerous road or to ford a dangerous river unless he had to—that is, any one of our class, any man of education or imagination? It's the greater fear of being thought afraid that makes us brave. Take a lawyer in a shipwreck—take myself! Don't you suppose he's frightened? Naturally he is, horribly frightened. It's his reason, his mind, that after a while gets the better of his poor pipe-stem legs and makes them keep pace with the sea-legs about them."

"It's condition," said Jerrick doggedly—"condition entirely. All has to do with your liver and digestion. I know; I fox-hunt, and when I was younger—yes, leave my waist alone!—I rode jumping races. When you're fit there isn't a horse alive that bothers you, or a fence, for that matter, or a bit of water."

"Ever try standing on a ship's deck, in the dark, knowing you're going to drown in about twenty minutes?" asked Hill.

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Hardy leaned forward to strike a match for his cigarette. "I don't agree with you," he said.

"Well, but—" began Hill.

"Neither of you."

"Oh, of course, you're outside the argument. You lead an adventurous life. You keep in condition for danger. It isn't fair."

"No." Hardy lit his cigarette and inhaled a puff thoughtfully. "You don't understand. All you have to say does have some bearing upon things, but, when you get down to brass tacks, it's instinct—at the last gasp, it's instinct. You can't get away from it. Look at the difference between a thoroughbred and a cold-blooded horse! There you are! That's true. It's the fashion now to discount instinct, I know; well—but you can't get away from it. I've thought about the thing—a lot. Men are brave against their better reason, against their conscience. It's a mixed-up thing. It's confusing and—and sort of damnable," he concluded lamely.

"Sort of damnable!" ejaculated Hill wonderingly.

"Yes, damnable."

I experienced inspiration. "You've got a concrete instance back of that," I ventured.

Hardy removed his gaze from the ceiling.

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"Er—" he stammered. "Why, yes—yes. That's true."

"You'd better tell it," suggested Hill; "otherwise your argument is not very conclusive."

Hardy fumbled with the spoon of his empty coffee-cup. It was a curious gesture on the part of a man whose franknesses were as clean-cut as his silences. "Well—" he began. "I don't know. Perhaps. I did know a man, though, who saved another man's life when he didn't want to, when there was every excuse for him not to, when he had it all reasoned out that it was wrong, the very wrongest possible thing to do; and he saved him because he couldn't help it, saved him at the risk of his own life, too."

"He did!" murmured Hill incredulously.

"Go on!" I urged. I was aware that we were on the edge of a revelation.

Hardy looked down at the spoon in his hand, then up and into my eyes.

"It's such a queer place to tell it"—he smiled deprecatingly—"here, in this restaurant. It ought to be about a camp-fire, or something like that. Here it seems out of place, like the smell of bacon or sweating mules. Do you know Los Pinos? Well, you wouldn't. It was just a few shacks and a Mexican gambling-house when I saw it.

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Maybe it isn't there any more, at all. You know —those places! People build them and then go away, and in a year there isn't a thing, just desert again and shifting sand and maybe the little original old ranch by the one spring." He swept the table-cloth with his hand, as if sweeping something into oblivion, and his eyes sought again the spoon. "It's queer, that business. Men and women go out to lonely places and build houses, and for a while everything goes on in miniature, just as it does here—daily bread and hating and laughing—and then something happens, the gold gives out or the fields won't pay, and in no time nature is back again. It's a big fight. You lose track of it in crowded places." He raised his head and settled his arms comfortably on the table.

"I wasn't there for any particular purpose. I was on a holiday. I'd been on a big job up in Colorado and was rather done up, and, as there were some prospects in New Mexico I wanted to see, I hit south, drifting through Santa Fé and Silver City, until I found myself way down on the southern edge of Arizona. It was still hot down there—hot as blazes—it was about the first of September—and the rattlesnakes and the scorpions were still as active as crickets. I knew a

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chap that had a cattle outfit near the Mexican border, so I dropped in on him one day and stayed two weeks. You see, he was lonely. Had a passion for theatres and hadn't seen a play for five years. My second-hand gossip was rather a god-send. But finally I got tired of talking about Mary Mannering, and decided to start north again. He bade me good-by on a little hill near his place. 'See here!' he said suddenly, looking toward the west. 'If you go a trifle out of your way you'll strike Los Pinos, and I wish you would. It's a little bit of a dump of the United Copper Company's, no good, I'm thinking, but the fellow in charge is a friend of mine. He's got his wife there. They're nice people—or used to be. I haven't seen them for ten years. They say he drinks a little—well, we all do. Maybe you could write me how she—I mean, how he is getting on?' And he turned red. I saw how the land lay, and as a favor to him I said I would.

"It was eighty miles away, and I drifted in there one night on top of a tired cow-horse just at sundown. You know how purple—violet, really—those desert evenings are. There was violet stretching away as far as I could see, from the faint violet at my stirrups to the deep, almost black violet of the horizon. Way off to the north

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I could make out the shadow of some big hills that had been ahead of me all day. The town, what there was of it, lay in a little gully. Along its single street there were a few lights shining like small yellow flowers. I asked my way of a Mexican, and he showed me up to where the Whitneys—that name will do as well as any—lived, in a decent enough sort of bungalow, it would seem, above the gully. He left me there, and I went forward and rapped at the door. Light shone from between the cracks of a near-by shutter, and I could hear voices inside—a man's voice mostly, hoarse and high-pitched. Then a Chinaman opened the door for me and I had a look inside, into a big living-room beyond. It was civilized all right enough, pleasantly so to a man stepping out of two days of desert and Mexican adobes. At a glance I saw the rugs on the polished floor, and the Navajo blankets about, and a big table in the centre with a shaded lamp and magazines in rows; but the man in riding-clothes standing before the empty fireplace wasn't civilized at all, at least not at that moment. I couldn't see the woman, only the top of her head above the back of a big chair, but as I came in I heard her say, 'Hush!—Bob—please!' and I noticed that what I could see of her hair was of that

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fine true gold you so seldom find. The man stopped in the middle of a sentence and swayed on his feet, then he looked over at me and came toward me with a sort of bulldog, inquiring look. He was a big, red-faced, blond chap, about forty, I should say, who might once have been handsome. He wasn't now, and it didn't add to his beauty that he was quite obviously fairly drunk. 'Well?' he said, and blocked my way.

"'I'm a friend of Henry Martin's,' I answered. 'I've got a letter for you.' I was beginning to get pretty angry.

"'Henry Martin?' He laughed unsteadily. 'You'd better give it to my wife over there. She's his friend. I hardly know him.' I don't know when I'd seen a man I disliked as much at first sight.

"There was a rustle from the other side of the room, and Mrs. Whitney came toward us. I avoided her unattractive husband and took her hand, and I understood at once whatever civilizing influences there were about the bungalow we were in. Did you ever do that—ever step out of nowhere, in a wild sort of country, and meet suddenly a man or a woman who might have come straight from a pleasant, well-bred room filled with books and flowers and quiet, nice people?

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It's a sensation that never loses its freshness. Mrs. Whitney was like that. I wouldn't have called her beautiful; she was better; you knew she was good and clean-cut and a thoroughbred the minute you saw her. She was lovely, too; don't misunderstand me, but you had more important things to think about when you were talking to her. Just at the moment I was wondering how any one who so evidently had been crying could all at once greet a stranger with so cordial a smile. But she was all that—all nerve; I don't think I ever met a woman quite like her—so fine, you understand."

Hardy paused. "Have any of you chaps got a cigarette?" he asked; and I noticed that his hand, usually the steadiest hand imaginable, trembled ever so slightly. "Well," he began again, "there you are! I had tumbled into about as rotten a little, pitiful a little tragedy as you can imagine, there in a God-forsaken desert of Arizona, with not a soul about but a Chinaman, a couple of Scotch stationary engineers, an Irish foreman, two or three young mining men, and a score of Mexicans. Of course, my first impulse was to get out the next morning, to cut it—it was none of my business—although I determined to drop a line to Henry Martin; but I didn't go. I

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had a talk with Mrs. Whitney that night, after her unattractive husband had taken himself off to bed, and somehow I couldn't leave just then. You know how it is, you drop into a place where nothing in the world seems likely to happen, and all of a sudden you realize that something *is* going to happen, and for the life of you you can't go away. That situation up on top of the hill couldn't last forever, could it? So I stayed on. I hunted out the big Irish foreman and shared his cabin. The Whitneys asked me to visit them, but I didn't exactly feel like doing so. The Irishman was a fine specimen of his race, ten years out from Dublin, and everywhere else since that time; generous, irascible, given to great fits of gayety and equally unexpected fits of gloom. He would sit in the evenings, a short pipe in his mouth, and stare up at the Whitney bungalow on the hill above.

“‘That Jim Whitney’s a divvle,’ he confided to me once. ‘Wan o’ these days I’ll hit him over th’ head with a pick and be hung for murther. Now, what in hell d’ye suppose a nice girl like that sticks by him for? If it weren’t for her I’d ‘a’ reported him long ago. The scut!’ And I remember that he spat gloomily.

“But I got to know the answer to that question

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sooner than I had expected. You see, I went up to the Whitneys' often, in the afternoon, or for dinner, or in the evening, and I talked to Mrs. Whitney a great deal; although sometimes I just sat and smoked and listened to her play the piano. She played beautifully. It was a treat to a man who hadn't heard music for two years. There was a little thing of Grieg's—a spring song, or something of the sort—and you've no idea how quaint and sad and appealing it was, and incongruous, with all its freshness and murmuring about waterfalls and pine-trees, there, in those hot, breathless Arizona nights. Mrs. Whitney didn't talk much; she wasn't what you'd call a particularly communicative woman, but bit by bit I pieced together something continuous. It seems that she had run away with Whitney ten years before— Oh, yes! Henry Martin! That had been a schoolgirl affair. Nothing serious, you understand. But the Whitney matter had been different. She was greatly in love with him. And the family had disapproved. Some rich, stuffy Boston people, I gathered. But she had made up her mind and taken matters in her own hands. That was her way—a clean-cut sort of person—like a gold-and-white arrow; and now she was going to stick by her choice no matter

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what happened; owed it to Whitney. There was the quirk in her brain; we all have a quirk somewhere, and that was hers. She felt that she had ruined his career; he had been a brilliant young engineer, but her family had kicked up the devil of a row, and, as they were powerful enough, and nasty enough, had more or less hounded him out of the East. Of course, personally, I never thought he showed any of the essentials of brilliancy, but that's neither here nor there; she did, and she was satisfied that she owed him all she had. I suppose, too, there was some trace of a Puritan conscience back of it, some inherent feeling about divorce; and there was pride as well, a desire not to let that disgusting family of hers know into what ways her idol had fallen. Any-way, she was adamant—oh, yes, I made no bones about it, I up and asked her one night why she didn't get rid of the hound. So there she was, that white-and-gold woman, with her love of music, and her love of books, and her love of fine things, and her gentleness, and that sort of fiery, suppressed Northern blood, shut up on top of an Arizona dump with a beast that got drunk every night and twice a day on Sunday. It was worse even than that. One night—we were sitting out on the veranda—her scarf slipped, and I saw a

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scar on her arm, near her shoulder.” Hardy stopped abruptly and began to roll a little pellet of bread between his thumb and his forefinger; then his tense expression faded and he sat back in his chair.

“Let me have another cigarette,” he said to Jarrick. “No. Wait a minute! I’ll order some.”

He called a waiter and gave his instructions. “You see,” he continued, “when you run across as few nice women as I do that sort of thing is more than ordinarily disturbing. And then I suppose it was the setting, and her loneliness, and everything. Anyway, I stayed on. I got to be a little bit ashamed of myself. I was afraid that Mrs. Whitney would think me prompted by mere curiosity or a desire to meddle, so after a while I gave out that I was prospecting that part of Arizona, and in the mornings I would take a horse and ride out into the desert. I loved it, too; it was so big and spacious and silent and hot. One day I met Whitney on the edge of town. He was sober, as he always was when he had to be; he was a masterful brute, in his way. He stopped me and asked if I had found anything, and when I laughed he didn’t laugh back. ‘There’s gold here,’ he said. ‘Lots of gold. Did you ever hear the story of the Ten Strike Mine? Well, it’s

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over there.' He swept with his arm the line of distant hills to the north. 'The crazy Dutchman that found it staggered into Almuda, ten miles down the valley, just before he died; and his pockets were bulging with samples—pure gold, almost. Yes, by thunder! And that's the last they ever heard of it. Lots of men have tried—lots of men. Some day I'll go myself, surer than shooting.' And he let his hands drop to his sides and stared silently toward the north, a queer, dreamy anger in his eyes. I've seen lots of mining men, lots of prospectors, in my time, and it didn't take me long to size up that look of his. 'Aha, my friend!' I said to myself. 'So you've got another vice, have you! It isn't only rum that's got a hold on you!' And I turned my horse into the town.

"But our conversation seemed to have stirred to the surface something in Whitney's brain that had been at work there a long time, for after that he would never let me alone about his Ten Strike Mine and the mountains that hid it. 'Over there!' he would say, and point to the north. From the porch of his bungalow the sleeping hills were plainly visible above the shimmering desert. He would chew on the end of a cigar and consider. 'It isn't very far, you know. One day—

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maybe two. All we need's water. No water there—at least, none found. All those fellows who've prospected are fools. I'm an expert; so are you. I tell you, Hardy, let's do it! A half a dozen little old pack-mules! Eh? How about it? Next week? I can get off. God, I'd like money!' And he would subside into a sullen silence. At first I laughed at him; but I can tell you that sort of thing gets on your nerves sooner or later and either makes you bolt it or else go. At the end of two weeks I actually found myself considering the fool thing seriously. Of course, I didn't want to discover a lost gold-mine, that is, unless I just happened to stumble over it; I wanted to keep away from such things; they're bad; they get into a man's blood like drugs; but I've always had a hankering for a new country, and those hills, shining in the heat, were compelling—very compelling. Besides, I reflected, a trip like that might help to straighten Whitney up a little. I hadn't much hope, to be sure, but drowning men clutch at straws. It's curious what sophistry you use to convince yourself, isn't it? And then—something happened that for two weeks occupied all my mind."

Hardy paused, considered for a moment the glowing end of his cigarette, and finally looked up

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gravely; there was a slight hesitation, almost an embarrassment, in his manner. "I don't exactly know how to put it," he began. "I don't want you chaps to imagine anything wrong; it was all very nebulous and indefinite, you understand—Mrs. Whitney was a wonderful woman. I wouldn't mention the matter at all if it wasn't necessary for the point of my story; in fact, it is the point of my story. But there was a man there—one of the young engineers—and quite suddenly I discovered that he was in love with Mrs. Whitney, and I think—I never could be quite sure, but I think she was in love with him. It must have been one of those sudden things, a storm out of a clear sky, deluging two people before they were aware. I imagine it was brought to the surface by the chap's illness. He had been out riding on the desert and had got off to look at something, and a rattlesnake had struck him—a big, dustdirty thing—on the wrist, and, very faint, he had galloped back to the Whitneys'. And what do you suppose she had done—Mrs. Whitney, that is? Flung herself down on him and sucked the wound! Yes, without a moment's hesitation, her gold hair all about his hand and her white dress in the dirt. Of course, it was a foolish thing to do, and not in the least the right

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way to treat a wound, but she had risked her life to do it; a slight cut on her lip; you understand; a tiny, ragged place. Afterward, she had cut the wound crosswise, so, and had put on a ligature, and then had got the man into the house some way and nursed him until he was quite himself again. I dare say he had been in love with her a long while without knowing it, but that clinched matters. Those things come overpoweringly and take a man, down in places like that—semitropical and lonely and lawless, with long, empty days and moonlit nights. Perhaps he told Mrs. Whitney; he never got very far, I am sure. She was a wonderful woman—but she loved him, I think. You can tell those things, you know; a gesture, an unavoidable look, a silence.

“Anyway, I saw what had happened and I was sorry, and for a fortnight I hung around, loath to go, but hating myself all the while for not doing so. And every day Whitney would come at me with his insane scheme. ‘Over there! It isn’t very far. A day—maybe two. How about it? Eh?’ and then that tense sweep of the arm to the north. I don’t know what it was, weariness, disgust, irritation of the whole sorry plan of things, but finally, and to my own astonishment, I found myself consenting, and within

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two days Whitney had his crazy pack outfit ready, and on the morning of the third day we set out. Mrs. Whitney had said nothing when we unfolded our intentions to her, nor did she say anything when we departed, but stood on the porch of the bungalow, her hand up to her throat, and watched us out of sight. I wondered what she was thinking about. The Voodoos—that was the name of the mountains we were heading for—had killed a good many men in their time."

Hardy took a long and thoughtful sip from the glass in front of him before he began again. "I've knocked about a good deal in my life," he said; "I've been lost—once in the jungle; I've starved; I've reached the point where I've imagined horrors, heard voices, you understand, and seen great, bearded men mouthing at me—a man's pretty far gone when that happens to him—but that trip across the desert was the worst I've ever taken. By day it was all right, just swaying in your saddle, half asleep a good part of the time, the smell of warm dust in your nose, the pack-mules plodding along behind; but the nights! —I tell you, I've sat about camp-fires up the Congo and watched big, oily black men eat their food, and I once saw a native village sacked, but I'd rather be tied for life to a West Coast nigger

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than to a man like Whitney. It isn't good for two people to be alone in a place like that and for one to hate the other as I hated him. God knows why I didn't kill him; I'd have to get up and leave the fire and go out into the night, and, mind you, I'd be shuddering like a man with the ague under that warm, soft air. And he never for a minute suspected it. His mind was scarred with drink as if a worm had bored its slow way in and out of it. I can see him now, cross-legged, beyond the flames, big, unshaven, heavy-jowled, dirty, what he thought dripping from his mouth like the bacon drippings he was too lazy to wipe away. I won't tell you what he talked about; you know, the old thing; but not the way even the most wrong-minded of ordinary men talks; there was a sodden, triumphant deviltry in him that was appalling. He cursed the country for its lack of opportunity of a certain kind; he was like a hound held in leash, gloating over what he would do when he got back to the kennels of civilization again. And all the while, at the back of my mind, was a picture of that white-and-gold woman of his, way back toward the south, waiting his return because she owed him her life for the brilliant career she had ruined. It made you sometimes almost want to laugh—insanely. I

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used to lie awake at night and pray whatever there was to kill him, and do it quickly. I would have turned back, but I felt that every day I could keep him away from Los Pinos was a day gained for Mrs. Whitney. He was a dangerous maniac, too. The first day he behaved himself fairly well, but that night, after supper, when we had cleaned up, he began to fumble through the packs, and finally produced a bottle of brandy.

“‘Fine camping stuff!’ he announced. ‘Lots of results for very little weight. Have some?’

“‘Are you going to drink that?’ I asked.

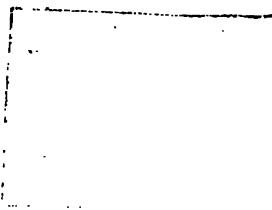
“‘Oh, go to the devil!’ he snapped. ‘I’ve been out as much as you have.’ I didn’t argue with him further; I hoped if he drank enough the sun would get him. But the second night he upset the water-kegs, two of them. He had been carrying on some sort of weird celebration by himself, and finally staggered out into the desert, singing at the top of his lungs, and the first thing I knew he was down among the kegs, rolling over and over, and kicking right and left. The one that was open was gone; another he kicked the plug out of, but I managed to save about a quarter of its contents. The next morning I spoke to him about it. He blinked his red eyes and chuckled.

“‘Poor sort of stuff, anyway,’ he said.



“I’d have to get up and leave the fire and go out into the night.”

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The Water-Hole

“‘Yes,’ I agreed; ‘but without it you would blow out like a candle in a dust-storm.’ After that we didn’t speak to each other except when it was necessary.

“We were in the foot-hills of the Voodoos by now, and the next day we got into the mountains themselves—great, bare ragged peaks, black and red and dirty yellow, like the cooled-off slake of a furnace. Every now and then a dry gully came down from nowheres; and the only human thing one could see was occasionally, on the sides of one of these, a shivering, miserable, half-dead piñon—nothing but that, and the steel-blue sky overhead, and the shimmering desert behind us. It was hot—good Lord! The horn of your saddle burned your hand. That night we camped in a canyon, and the next day went still higher up, following the course of a rutted stream that probably ran water once in a year. Whitney wanted to turn east, and it was all a toss-up to me; the place looked unlikely enough, anyway, although you never can tell. I had settled into the monotony of the trip by now and didn’t much care how long we stayed out. One day was like another—hot little swirls of dust, sweat of mules, and great black cliffs; and the nights came and went like the passing of a sponge over a fevered

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face. On the sixth day the tragedy happened. It was toward dusk, and one of the mules, the one that carried the last of our water, fell over a cliff.

“He wasn’t hurt; just lay on his back and smiled crossly; but the kegs and the bags were smashed to bits. I like mules, but I wanted to kill that one. It was quiet down there in the canyon—quiet and hot. I looked at Whitney and he looked at me, and I had the sudden, unpleasant realization that he was a coward, added to his other qualifications. Yes, a coward! I saw it in his blurred eyes and the quivering of his bloated lips—stark dumb funk. That was bad. I’m afraid I lost my nerve, too; I make no excuses; fear is infectious. At all events, we tore down out of that place as if death was after us, the mules clattering and flapping in the rear. After a time I rode more slowly, but in the morning we were nearly down at the desert again; and there it lay before us, shimmering like a lake of salt—two days back to water.

“The next day was rather a blur, as if a man were walking on a red-hot mirror that tipped up and down and tried to take his legs from under him. There was a water-hole a little to the east of the way we had come, and toward that I tried

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to head. One of the mules gave out, and staggered and groaned, and tried to get up again. I remember hearing him squeal, once; it was horrible. He lay there, a little black speck on the desert. Whitney and I didn't speak to each other at all, but I thought of those two kegs of water he had upset. Have you ever been thirsty—mortally thirsty, until you feel your tongue black in your mouth? It's queer what it does to you. Do you remember that little place—Zorn's—at college? We used to sit there sometimes on spring afternoons. It was cool and cavern-like, and through the open door one could see the breeze in the maple-trees. Well, I thought about that all the time; it grew to be an obsession, a mirage. I could smell the moss-like smell of bock beer; I even remembered conversations we had had. You fellows were as real to me 'as you are real to-night. It's strange, and then, when you come to, uncanny; you feel the sweat on you turn cold.

"We had ridden on in that way I don't know how long, snatching a couple of feverish hours of sleep in the night, Whitney groaning and mumbling horribly, when suddenly my horse gave a little snicker—low, the way they do when you give them grain—and I felt his tired body straighten

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up ever so little. 'Maybe,' I thought, and I looked up. But I didn't much care; I just wanted to crawl into some cool place and forget all about it and die. It was late in the afternoon. My shadow was lengthening. Too late, really, for much mirage; but I no longer put great stock in green vegetation and matters of that kind; I had seen too much of it in the last day and a half fade away into nothing—nothing but blistering, damned sand. And so I wouldn't believe the cool reeds and the sparkling water until I had dipped down through a little swale and was actually fighting my horse back from the brink. I knew enough to do that, mind you, and to fight back the two mules so that they drank just a little at a time—a little at a time; and all the while I had to wait, with my tongue like sand in my mouth. Over the edge of my horse's neck I could see the water just below; it looked as cool as rain. I was always a little proud of that—that holding back; it made up, in a way, for the funk of two nights earlier. When the mules and my horse were through I dismounted and, lying flat, bathed my hands, and then, a tiny sip at a time, began to drink. That was hard. When I stood up the heat seemed to have gone, and the breeze was moist and sweet with the smell of eve-

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ning. I think I sang a little and waved my hands above my head, and, at all events, I remember I lay on my back and rolled a cigarette; and quite suddenly and without the slightest reason there were tears in my eyes. Then I began to wonder what had become of Whitney; I hadn't thought of him before. I got to my feet, and just as I did so I saw him come over the little rise of sand, swaying in his saddle, and trying, the fool, to make his horse run. He looked like a great scare-crow blown out from some Indian maize-field into the desert. His clothes were torn and his mask of a face was seamed and black from dust and sweat; he saw the water and let out one queer, hoarse screech and kicked at his horse with wabbling legs.

““Look out!” I cried, and stepped in his way. I had seen this sort of thing before and knew what to expect; but he rode me down as if I hadn't been there. His horse tried to avoid me, and the next moment the sack of grain on its back was on the sands, creeping like a great, monstrous, four-legged thing toward the water. ‘Stay where you are,’ I said, ‘and I'll bring you some.’ But he only crawled the faster. I grabbed his shoulder. ‘You fool!’ I said. ‘You'll kill yourself!’

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“‘Damn you!’ he blubbered. ‘Damn you!’ And before I knew it, and with all the strength, I imagine, left in him, he was on his feet and I was looking down the barrel of his gun. It looked very round and big and black, too. Beyond it his eyes were regarding me; they were quite mad, there was no doubt about that, but, just the way a dying man achieves some of his old desire to live, there was definite purpose in them. ‘You get out of my way,’ he said, and began very slowly to circle me. You could hardly hear his words, his lips were so blistered and swollen.

“And now this is the point of what I am telling you.” Hardy fumbled again for a match and relit his cigarette. “There we were, we two, in that desert light, about ten feet from the water, he with his gun pointing directly at my heart—and his hand wasn’t trembling as much as you would imagine, either—and he was circling me step by step, and I was standing still. I suppose the whole affair took two minutes, maybe three, but in that time—and my brain was still blurred to other impressions—I saw the thing as clearly as I see it now, as clearly as I saw that great, swollen beast of a face. Here was the chance I had longed for, the hope I had lain awake at night and prayed for; between the man and death

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I alone stood; and I had every reason, every instinct of decency and common sense, to make me step aside. The man was a devil; he was killing the finest woman I had ever met; his presence poisoned the air he walked in; he was an active agent of evil, there was no doubt of that. I hated him as I had never hated anything else in my life, and at the moment I was sure that God wanted him to die. I knew then that to save him would be criminal; I think so still. And I saw other considerations as well; saw them as clearly as I see you sitting here. I saw the man who loved Mrs. Whitney, and I saw Mrs. Whitney herself, and in my keeping, I knew, was all her chance for happiness, the one hope that the future would make up to her for some of the horror of the past. It would have been an easy thing to do; the most ordinary caution was on my side. Whitney was far larger than I, and, even in his weakened condition—I was weak myself—stronger, and he had a gun that in a flash of light could blow me into eternity. And what would happen then? Why, when he got back to Los Pinos they would hang him; they would be only too glad of the chance; and his wife?—she would die; I knew it—just go out like a flame from the unbearableness of it all. And there,

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wasn't one chance in a thousand that he wouldn't kill me if I made a single step toward him. I had only to let him go and in a few minutes he would be dead—as dead as his poor brute of a horse would be within the hour. I felt already the cool relief that would be mine when the black shadow of him was gone. I would ride into town and think no more of it than if I had watched a tarantula die. You see, I had it all reasoned out as clearly as could be; there was morality and common sense, the welfare of other people, the man's own good, really, and yet—well, I didn't do it."

"Didn't?" It was Jarrick who put the question a little breathlessly.

"No. I stepped toward him—so! One step, then another, very slowly, hardly a foot at a time, and all the while I watched the infernal circle of that gun, expecting it every minute to spit fire. I didn't want to go; I went against my will. I was scared, too, mortally scared; my legs were like lead—I had to think every time I lifted a foot—and in a queer, crazy way I seemed to feel two people, a man and a woman, holding me back, plucking at my sleeves. But I went. All the time I kept saying, very steady and quiet: 'Don't shoot, Whitney! D'you hear! Don't



“I kept saying, very steady and quiet: ‘Don’t shoot, Whitney!
Don’t shoot or I’ll kill you!’”

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The Water-Hole

shoot or I'll kill you!' Wasn't it silly? Kill him! Why, he had me dead ten times before I got to him. But I suppose some trace of sanity was knocking at his drink-sodden brain, for he didn't shoot—just watched me, his red eyes blinking. So! One step at a time—nearer and nearer—I could feel the sweat on my forehead—and then I jumped. I had him by the legs, and we went down in a heap. He shot then; they always do! But I had him tied up with the rags of his own shirt in a trice. Then I brought him water in my hat and let him drink it, drop by drop. After a while he came to altogether. But he never thanked me; he wasn't that kind of a brute. I got him into town the morning of the second day and turned him over to his wife. So you see"—Hardy hesitated and looked at the circle of our faces with an odd, appealing look—"it *is* queer, isn't it? All mixed up. One doesn't know." He sank back in his chair and began to scratch, absent-mindedly, at a holder with a match.

The after-theatre crowd was beginning to come in; the sound of laughter and talk grew steadily higher; far off an orchestra waisted inarticulately.

"What became of them?" I asked.

Hardy looked up as if startled. "The Whitneys? Oh—she died—Martin wrote me. Down

The Water-Hole

there, within a year. One would know it would happen. Like a flame, I suppose—suddenly."

"And the man—the fellow who was in love with her?"

Hardy stirred wearily. "I haven't heard," he said. "I suppose he is still alive."

He leaned over to complete the striking of his match, and for an instant his arm touched a glass; it trembled and hung in the balance, and he shot out a sinewy hand to stop it, and as he did so the sleeve of his dinner-jacket caught. On the brown flesh of his forearm I saw a queer, ragged white cross—the scar a snake-bite leaves when it is cicatrized. I meant to avoid his eyes, but somehow I caught them instead. They were veiled and hurt.

LE PANACHE



LE PANACHE

WHEN a man comes into Maxim's—the pre-war Maxim's—at ten o'clock of a spring night, just when gayety has reached a zenith, sits down beside you, nods with an air of acquaintanceship to the head waiter, gives him a twenty-franc piece, and requests him in excellent French to have the orchestra play the love-song from "Samson and Delilah," the incident has about it something of interest. When the man in question leans back with speculative intensity in his far-sighted gray eyes and a half-smile hovering about his determined, clean-shaven mouth your interest vacillates between admiration and dislike. No matter how charmingly done, it would impress a spectator as procedure not altogether to be commended if—in hell, say—a shade from a happier climate were to walk rapidly through, carrying in each hand a bucket of water untastable by the lambent-eyed spectres lined up on either side of him. There is about such an action an especial kind of imaginative cruelty.

Out of the babble of voices, the laughter; into the cigarette smoke and the smell of flowers and

Le Panache

perfume suddenly threaded the lovely ribbon of the music. A woman across the way laid down her fork and stared; a boy beside her, fresh-colored, charming in his evening clothes, raised his head. One had an impression of a score of amusing stories suspended in mid-air; one had an impression of leaving a stifling city in mid-August and coming to a place where pine forests reach down to a blue-and-white sea. Only it isn't fair to take people to such a coast when immediately they must return to the fetid alleys where they live. I turned to the man beside me.

"Do you do this sort of thing often?" I asked.

He started, as if up to the moment he had not been acutely aware of my presence; then he smiled. It was a charming smile, disarming, good-tempered, alert. He pushed back his glass of champagne.

"No." He shook his head. "No; I don't do this sort of thing often. No, never before, as a matter of fact." He studied the quiet, a trifle astonished, greatly sobered people around him. "Probably," he continued, "I shall never do it again. It isn't exactly what the English call 'cricket,' is it? And yet—life's largely a matter of moments, isn't it? and what's best—unrelieved

Le Panache

sordidness, or perhaps for once a lark singing above the courtyard of a tenement? Well, I wanted to see, anyway." He reflected. "My impulses are not always kindly," he concluded.

Ingenuousness and subtlety are a rare combination; I studied my new-found companion with interest. He was a slight, tall man of thirty-five or thirty-seven, and his dress clothes expressed to the smallest detail the unusual qualities of precision and intuition. His dark hair was prematurely gray—carefully parted and brushed back from his forehead—and underneath it was a keen and youthful face—an exceptional face, distinctly American in its spare lines and clean-cut chin, and yet with a look about it as if its possessor had seen intimately many lands. Moreover, it was the face of a man who both thought and acted; of a man who had read and a man who had driven ships, or ridden horses, or perhaps both, against winds. Above the fresh coloring of the cheeks were a few little lines and above these again a warm and permanent sunburn; and the thin mouth held a suggestion of grimnesses that could be instantly recaptured should occasion arise—the grimnesses of a mouth accustomed to taste without complaining the incessant vagaries of nature. There is no confus-

Le Panache

ing the inevitable lurking grimness of an outdoor man with the thin acerbity of his indoor neighbor. About the former is a concomitant humor.

We ordered supper; we talked; around us the laughter swelled again.

And life is that way, isn't it? Altogether a matter of chance, except that you can't altogether escape the sense that back of the chance is perhaps an ultimate design. One so often does find important events, important friends-to-be, on a steamer casually taken; on a mountain trail casually chosen; out of the blue; without forewarning, I might so easily have missed Hugh Craig that night. I was on the point of leaving Maxim's when he came in and took the seat beside me.

He had been born, it seems, in Pennsylvania, the northern part of the State, where his father had foundries and a huge acreage. I achieved a picture of a life...almost feudal: a great old-fashioned house; workmen, until recently, at all events, descendants of men who had worked for the Craigs since before the War of Independence; wide fields; and a town with, at one end of it, immense iron-shops that lay upon the greenness of the surrounding country like soot knocked from a stove-pipe onto a lawn. Craig had a family—a father with a long white beard and cer-

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tain undiscussable ideas of right and wrong. I gathered that he had worked too hard ever to experience any God except one who was an expert bookkeeper—a sort of minor bureaucrat whose mind never overlooked a single cent on the debit or credit side, no matter how many gold pieces you might otherwise fling to a starving world. There was also a mother, a gentle, charitable soul whose preoccupation was the town and countryside over which, without any questioning on her part of social justice, she found herself mistress. Like many women she labored with hands not too intelligent to assuage the cunning wrongs of a system upon which her men-folk were concentrating all their energies to the task of making it more and more unbearable. Then there was a sister, who had married a Spaniard, and an elder brother who apparently, in the eyes of Craig's father, was all that Craig himself was not. Here, you perceive, was an older generation and two survivals of that generation, and a fifth member of the family who was not a survival at all. Between him and all the rest of his kin was distinct cleavage; and as a rule cleavage makes for history. One surmised the modern vast and vague discontent, a searching for new and—but here is the difficulty—workable ideals.

Le Panache

You must understand me—what I learned of Craig at that first meeting was not in any connected way—not as a narrative, not by direct statement. He was, as I subsequently discovered, the last man in the world to talk his soul out to any one about his personal relationships. Nor was he enough of an egotist to indulge himself in the contemporaneous pastime of deprecating the old order of things and applauding the new. In fact, at that time he was regretting the passing of the old—deplored the breaking down of standards, the resulting confusion. “How the deuce,” he said, “is a man to keep his head up in this maelstrom? How can he preserve the integrity of his soul in a ‘panic’ world? Everything is either nibbling away at it, or else seeking to engulf it.” You see, he seldom talked personally at all—almost altogether about abstract matters. But he had the gift of illuminating sentences, sentences that illustrated a point, or explained an incident, and by means of these you eventually pieced together some sort of a portrait. In such a way I learned that he had been a sheep-herder in Arizona; a cattleman in Montana; a settler in Australia; for six lurid months a sailor before the mast; that he had an especial feeling for trades and, in a secondary sense, for sport—

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anything, you understand, possessing the magic conjunction of hand and mind; that required what he called "Attic directness"—and that at one time he had learned the art of blacksmithing. As for the mere making of money, he was contemptuous. Any one could make money if they were willing to give up everything else to that one end. He had given up ten solid years. Now he had all the money he wanted, and had retired. Ostensibly he was engaged in a tour of the world for the purpose of playing polo wherever polo was to be had.

We paid our bills, and put on our coats and top hats, and walked out into the street. We were unaware that life, in an unpleasant, simian fashion, was at the moment preparing to leap out at us. Life seemed to have a habit of treating Craig in this way.

A young man, a woman beside him, was waiting for his motor under the awning. I had noticed him sitting directly opposite us in the restaurant. He belonged to an easily recognizable type. He was big and bulky and blond-haired; his clothes were expensive and his gestures were those of a person carefully trained in outward things. No doubt he was rich; no doubt he had been to some great university; I was willing to

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wager that he came from New York and drove a powerful "motor" with a two-fisted disregard of other people's rights. In short, he was the sinister but not unattractive figure that America—in its older communities—is at present producing in rather alarming quantities. He leaned upon his walking-stick and as Craig passed remarked to his companion:

"There's the bounder that tried to break things up."

I don't think he particularly intended Craig to hear; but at the same time I don't think he particularly cared if he did hear.

The effect upon Craig was interesting. He stopped and turned to me. "Do you think," he asked in a slow, precise voice, "that they are talking about me?" There was an odd underlying amusement in his voice. I experienced the restless alertness that impending danger gives one. Back of us I heard a slight rustling movement. Craig faced about and took off his hat and went up to the couple.

He addressed the young man very politely. "You are quite right," he said, "in objecting to what I did, but you are quite wrong in the tone and words you used just now. They showed that you think the world is divided into two classes—

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the people you like and bounders; and that's a filthy philosophy. Besides, you must never be rude to any one. For instance, I consider you the most objectionable product of a fairly objectionable age, but up to the moment I've been too polite to tell you so." He paused and regarded the young man's excellently fitting white waist-coat. Suddenly his pointed finger shot out and buried itself in the slightly too convex waist-line. It was the most insulting gesture I have ever seen. "You rotten pup!" he hissed. "You haven't even the decency to keep your fat down!" And, with amazing quickness, he leaped back out of range as the young man struck.

"Don't!" he commanded. "Don't! Wait a minute! We'll get arrested! Come around the corner!" He turned to the woman. "Madam," he said, "would you prefer to have my friend wait here with you, or will you accompany us? No—" as she made a movement to interfere. "Don't do that! If you do we'll fight just where we are, and then we'll all go to jail."

The woman shrank back. I was beginning to realize that Craig had the impressiveness and the suggestion of menace that exact obedience.

It was a curious little affair the moonlight and a deserted street leading off the rue Royale wit-

Le Panache

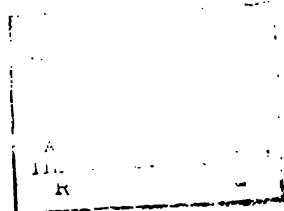
nessed. About it was a hint of rapiers and fluttering cloaks, despite the grim directness of modern combat. "We won't take off anything but our overcoats," said Craig; "we may have to run for it." He handed me his; then whirled and struck. The change of mood was astonishing. There were no preliminaries, none of the careful courtesy of the preceding conversation and walk; instead, a metamorphosis into something as terrific, as hurtling, as the charge of a wildcat. Craig, I saw at once, was a trained man, but a trained man with all the untrained bully's overpowering bewilderingness of movement. Here was no gentlemanly intent. You perceived a background of mining-camps and border saloons.

For a minute or so there was nothing to be heard in the silent street but the shuffling and the quick breathing of the fighting men. In the shadows of a doorway the woman cowered with her hands over her eyes. Then, suddenly, I saw Craig do an unbelievable thing; with agonizing force he brought his knee up into his opponent's solar plexus. The young man raised a white, incredulous, staring face, before he slowly sank to the ground and rolled over on his back, gasping for breath. Craig examined him briskly. "He's all right," he said. He put on his overcoat and



Craig examined him briskly. "He's all right," he said.

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calmly adjusted his collar. "Madam," he said to the woman, "I'll send a cab here." He surmised astonished distaste on my part. "Yes," he admitted, "it's disgusting—the whole thing. I know that." As we walked off in the direction we had come, he vouchsafed a partial explanation. "I used to try to fight rottenness squarely," he said; "but now I finish it off and get rid of it as soon as possible."

We drove in an open carriage to my hotel. I was still excited and distressed, but Craig was entirely gay and discursive and unperturbed. I remember the full moon over the trees, and the scent of chestnut blossoms, and the smell of wet asphalt, and the clock-clock of our horse's feet. We said good-by to each other. A sudden inexplicable intimacy held us silent for a moment. I watched Craig clamber back into the carriage and drive off. There was with me an impression that this polished, subtle, abruptly savage and ruthless young man was on a quest that would not end with the playing of polo. There was an underlying suggestion of a crusade. The cabman's whip might have been a spear.

From Spain after a while came a post-card with a picture on it of the Royal Palace in Madrid. "Playing polo," it read. "Rotten polo." Sub-

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sequently, following an interval of twelve months, was a letter from Japan. Craig was immensely impressed by the theory of personal dignity held by the Japanese, the dignity with which each man, no matter what his position, holds himself and is permitted to hold himself by his neighbors. He saw in it a possible relief for the "engulfing black muck of democratic selfishness."

Then I heard no more of him for two years. On an afternoon in June I ran into Kneass in a New York club.

Kneass is a professor of biology and, behind extremely near-sighted goggles, one of the most amusing men I know. We dined together on the roof-garden. "By the way, I came across a friend of yours the other night," said Kneass. He tried to peer at me over his spectacles. "His name was Hugh Craig. He was one of the most charming fellows I've ever met and—he was very drunk."

I expressed interest and regret.

"You needn't do that," resumed Kneass. "It wasn't unpleasant drunkenness. He'd just landed from a three years' trip around the world. Almost anybody, you know—" And he thereupon unfolded to me an odd tale, a story the perception of which would have been possible only to

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the mind of a man interested in the hidden drama of human motives.

“You see,” he explained reflectively, “it was the queerest thing I have ever witnessed. As a rule, intoxication falls into one of three classes—stupidity, carelessness, or viciousness; but I don’t think I ever before saw a man challenge it deliberately—without a trace of insolence or bravado, either—and fight it out as one would fight any other kind of fight. Throw down the glove to poison, as it were.” His near-sighted spectacles became misty, as the spectacles of near-sighted people are likely to become when they are very much moved. “Of course,” he resumed, “I don’t know whether in the beginning his action was intentional or not—perhaps he found that without realizing it he had taken more than he intended, but from that point on the issue was clear—to me at least; as far as the others were concerned, I don’t think they suspected Craig of being drunk at all—he was just as amusing, you see, just as alert and charming as ever; but he was engaged in a mortal struggle. I divined the agony of it—the coiled resistance of a mind that refuses to allow itself to be subjugated by anything. An illuminating side-light on the whole situation was that obviously he was refusing the

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easiest recourse toward regaining sobriety. He didn't want to take any undue advantage of his adversary, if you understand what I mean. He was giving alcohol a more than fair field, and then seeing whether or not he couldn't beat it on its own ground. He not only drank placidly all that was offered to him, but he purchased more himself. Thanks, I will have a light."

Kneass sat back in his chair and puffed at his cigar. "It was rather monstrous," he said, slowly exhaling; "rather frightening. A stark struggle of will usually is. One had the impression of a man fighting with every atom of muscle he possessed against the enveloping folds of a great serpent. I hope this friend of yours doesn't do such things often. If he does he'll kill himself."

I remarked that I had seen Craig only once in my life, but that I did not think he was given to many such unequal contests.

"I'm not sure," hesitated Kneass. "He rather impresses me as a man given to unequal contests. There is some underlying motive at work there. But I don't think his contests are with drink as a rule. He isn't a drinking man. You can tell by his eyes. And the most curious thing—the most curious thing of all—was—I'm on the house committee here, you know—that the next day Craig

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sent in his resignation. Why? He wasn't in the least objectionably drunk."

I rather expected, after this, the note which I got from Craig a few days later asking me to visit him at Scarboro—Scarboro was the name of his family place. I am glad I went. I attained, at all events, a dim idea of what he was after.

We had been riding, I remember, and were sitting on a fence near the stables watching the dusk come up over the distant purple hills, and I had confessed to a curiosity concerning this resignation from the Powhatan Club. For a moment Craig reflected before answering me. "Oh, that," he said carelessly, "that was merely self-inflicted punishment."

"But Kneass said you conquered in the end," I suggested.

He looked at me with awakened interest.

"Kneass is a damned clever chap, isn't he?" he observed. "No, I didn't conquer; not really. I'm afraid you can't conquer against poison." He suddenly got down from the fence and began to walk up and down, his hands in his pockets, his head bent in thought. "I'm not against wine," he said; "I'm not against any mellowing influence in a world that is daily growing starker and grimmer. But wine is like everything else;

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you can't let it get the better of you, can you? Everything is trying to do that, the rest of humanity included. The whole of the universe trying to crush one back into its own formless shape! We are modelled out of nothing, and then nothing seems to delight to wear away back to nothing the exquisite, subtle, individual thing that is each man's and woman's soul." He stopped in front of me and raised his head. The light of the setting sun touched his hair and face until there seemed about them the misty outline of a casque.

"Do you remember," he asked, "where, at the end of 'Cyrano de Bergerac,' Cyrano says, when he dies he hopes to sweep the floor of heaven with the plumes of his hat—his plume—his *panache*? Well, that is all I can make out of life, and perhaps after all it is the answer. We haven't any rules any longer: we must face each contingency by rules of our own inventing, framed as the contingency arises; but maybe out of it will come a greater thing—an instinctive, instantaneous knowledge that each man will have when his plume—his *panache*—is in danger; when there's a chance of soiling it so that he never will be able to sweep with it the floor of heaven." He paused as if a little ashamed of himself and laughed.

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"Come into the house, now," he said, "and I'll mix you a cocktail."

Those were pleasant weeks at Scarboro—spacious, ductile, fast-going. The earth was ripening to its harvest. Only the roaring foundries—and they were far from the house in which we lived—disturbed the tranquil mood. . . .

It was almost inevitable, wasn't it, that the next time I should see Craig, March of the following winter, he should be in love? The unattached man is subject to love about once every decade, and he is peculiarly susceptible when he begins to question the intrinsic value of most human action. It is as if, reaching down through the on-the-surface things, generally accepted as important, he is endeavoring to find the thing fundamentally important. I came on Craig on the beach at Santa Barbara. I hadn't known he was there. He was talking to a young woman of exceptional beauty. I think she resented my intrusion—one felt a suggestion of irritation under the overcordiality of the present generation of young women. But my surprise and pleasure at finding Craig were too great to permit me to consider in the least her emotions. I sat down.

She was a lovely person to look at; there was a hint of the South about her dark hair and dark,

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quick eyes and the rose-softness of her cheeks. She suited eminently the tawny warmth of the country she was in. As a matter of fact, she came from New York, was entirely wealthy, and was engrossed—barring an interest in Craig the depth of which I never could altogether fathom—in what she called “pah-ties.” Craig evidently found on her lips the clipped syllables adorable; he also apparently found overwhelmingly interesting a vivid, exaggerated discussion of dull people and their duller actions in various quarters of the world. I dug him out of this and asked him what he had been doing. It was odd to see his mood drop from him like shabby clothes from the body of a strong swimmer.

He had been in France driving an ambulance—of course, he would have been sooner or later. He regretted that he was too old to enlist for active service, and now he was back and was going to settle down in charge of the foundries at Scarboro. I hadn’t heard, had I? No, of course not. His father and mother were dead, you see, and his older brother had gone to Pittsburgh, where the firm now had its principal plants. This assumption of business responsibility surprised me. I don’t think Craig was altogether joyous. “Well, what was a man to do?” he asked.

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"I think it's splendid!" announced the girl. "I think it's perfectly splendid!" I cut her short; I feared the inevitable exhortation on "careers" that I knew would follow.

Craig suggested that a man's work did not necessarily affect what he thought. His lovely companion conjectured that too much thought was a bad thing anyhow; it usually made people "dippy." "Life was action."

"Life is action!" Good Lord! And in relation to the word "dippy," I suddenly found myself discovering about the girl who had so blithely used it a curious underlying agitation, a disconnectedness that showed a leakage in the direction of the prevalent disease of uncontrolled nerves. It is a sinister discovery; it is a very common one.

And the two statements quoted were the only ones containing a germ of abstract thought that I heard Miss Hamilton—Mary Hamilton was her name—utter in the three weeks during which I saw her more or less constantly. For I did see her constantly. Craig was exceptionally generous in this respect. I think, without admitting it to himself, he was glad of an antidote for the constant discussion of personal and not very important facts. Miss Hamilton, I am afraid, realized the cause of Craig's hospitality and resented

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it. The three of us went on picnics together, alone or with other people; we danced, we motored, we rode, we bathed. We talked about a great many things with disjointed vivacity. I felt as if I was being given a drug not altogether restful in its effect.

Men and women, however, manage to produce drama, even when one has as a factor the stubborn resistance toward drama exhibited by the average American girl. I received the impression that Craig was becoming bitterly unhappy, and I think he was making Mary Hamilton unhappy as well. After all, she probably cared as much for him as it was possible for her to care for any one. He was very charming, very rich, dimly she must have perceived him exceptional and clever. Probably she cherished the illusion common to many women that, once one of them has a man, once he is married to her, she will be able to take—well, at any rate, the uncomfortable edge off this cleverness. As for Craig, his trouble was that he also was cherishing illusions—deluding himself with the belief that Mary Hamilton possessed hidden possibilities, carried in her heart seeds of something beautiful and flowering, when she was, of course, merely a very beautiful, hopelessly spoiled girl, fed on the paprika of life until she

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had lost all appreciation of ordinary wholesome food. She was, however, yet to taste the sword-like desperation of a man of Craig's temperament. Unfortunately, I was to taste it too. Men of forty-five do not need adventitious thrills; they've had plenty of them. The thrill came about casually. It had to do with a motor ride upon which Craig took the girl he was in love with and myself.

Back of the Pacific coast are hills—mountains really—and through them are winding and narrow and beautiful roads. You zigzag up and up toward the softest and bluest of skies and below you drops away a country of vivid green valleys, with patches of green-gray live-oak, looking like apple orchards, on their sides. You have an extraordinary sensation of leaving behind a concrete world and of entering a world in which dimensions and time are of no account. Perhaps that is what affected Craig.

We had lunch at an inn forty miles or so back from the sea, and started home just at the apex of the afternoon and so did not reach the summit of the hills until immediately before dusk. At our feet the road looped in great spirals. Far off the distant town lay upon the smouldering fire of the sunset like misty blue smoke, and on a burning

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ocean the coast islands drifted like smoke broken off from the main ascending column.

Craig was driving his powerful car; in the back seat with me was Mary Hamilton. She commended the scenery, after the fashion of the daily ritual of the educated unthinking. After that I am not quite sure when I began to realize what was happening.

Speed is a comparative matter and from swift motion you thrust into great speed imperceptibly. All I knew was that the shadows of the canyons began to fly up at us with sudden, sweeping wings and that we lurched as we rounded a corner. At first, of course, I thought it a temporary carelessness on the part of Craig; but, the corner safely navigated, the great Stutz hunched its shoulders, as it were, and leaped forward into the dusk.

In the beginning I was too puzzled to move; then, very carefully, I leaned over to the driving seat and craned my neck so that I could see Craig's face. He was looking straight ahead of him, tense and alert. He was not ill, then; not in the least insane. I fell back into my corner, choking in its inception an idiotic impulse to drag him from his wheel. There was still permitted me a moment or so to wonder what it was all about. Was Craig trying to commit suicide?

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Evidently not. There was every opportunity for him to do so had he wanted—a momentary indifference, a mere flick of the wheel; but he was driving with all the concentrated skill of which a very experienced driver was capable. Sometimes we hung on two wheels, but we always hung. I don't know when a glimmering of the truth dawned on me: this was no deliberate attempt on the part of Craig to kill himself—that wouldn't have been like him, anyway—but he was, unless I was much mistaken, tossing dice with death—giving death, that is, every opportunity and then seeing if death could win. The idea was rather exhilarating. I looked at Mary Hamilton. Her hat had blown off; her dark hair was beginning to cascade about her shoulders; her eyes were like blazing stars. For the first time since I had known her I found myself admiring her—admiring her and at the same time hating her, which, where she was concerned, was also a new emotion; for she wasn't frightened—wasn't frightened at all, merely enraged, angry clear through.

After that we were swallowed up—I say we, I know that at least I was—in the sudden maniacal joy of speed. I lost all knowledge of self, except that once, as if I was listening to some one far off, I heard myself laughing. Otherwise, it was as if

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a great giant, with ballooning wings, had swept down upon us and was carrying us in locked arms—a trifle too tight, perhaps, but that was all—through an air of incredible thinness. You felt perfectly safe, safer than in the humdrum pursuits of life; you had passed the point where safety is a matter for consideration at all. The earth was a thing of curves and leaps and tawny mist, with, far in front of you, a red sea into which you would presently plunge with a pleasant sense of motion ended.

And then—as unexpectedly, as improbably, as it had begun—we slowed down as we reached the level road that led toward town. We glided through the dusk like any sober motoring party returning home to a sober dinner. And up in the mountains—no, even on the road just behind us—something monstrous and black was drawing in its wings, a puzzled look on its huge, blurred face.

When we came to the hedge-surrounded house where Miss Hamilton lived she descended without a word; Craig followed her. They paused under a street-lamp that threw a circle of orange light. For once the girl had lost the curious, icily reserved lack of reserve of modern manners. There were a few moments of primitive conversa-

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tion on her part. Craig heard her out in silence; then he said to her an extraordinary thing. I wonder if she will ever forget it. He bowed toward her.

"My dear," he said, "I could die with you gladly, but by God I couldn't live with you."

And he took off his cap and got into the car, and drove me home with an air of odd, cool non-chalance.

Once upon a time this is where the history of Craig would have stopped. The climax of the ordinary biography was supposed to end with the acceptance or rejection by a woman of a man, but recently we have begun to realize that very interesting things may happen even after crucial events such as those, and the most interesting thing—to my mind, at least—that happened to Craig did not happen until the August of the summer that followed.

I was back in the East and there came a letter from him asking me to join him at Scarboro. He was there all alone, hard at work on his new task. The letter hinted at labor troubles. "You may see something interesting," it suggested with a certain grim joyousness; "we are threatened with a strike. The old native element is no longer here, and my brother, with the usual long-sighted

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near-sightedness of the average business man, before he left encouraged an inroad of delightful but temperamental foreigners. 'Wops,' I believe they are called. Come up. Maybe you'll see me fight 'wops.' And the amusing thing is that I have spent all of a year trying to make myself poor and make them comfortable. They were perfectly contented until I came. If they really want the mills, they can have them, as far as I am concerned; only, the trouble is, I don't think they'd know how to run them if they had them." I went up to Scarboro and found myself indeed in the midst of a strike.

There is a cynical, sullen calm that falls before all serious trouble—before a cyclone, before a fight of really murderous intent. I arrived at the end of that calm. In the streets of the town were idle, black-haired men and women standing about in groups. The children were evidently enjoying a rare interval of entire lack of parental supervision. Before the doors of the mills were guards with rifles. It was eerie to find the great chimneys smokeless and the great buildings silent. In the house, a mile beyond the limits of the town, Craig was awaiting me. The contrast between the coolness of the countryside and the coolness of Craig in his white-flannel suit and the

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dull heat of the place through which I had just driven was dramatic.

“I’m glad you’re here,” he said; “you’ll like it.”

I suggested that possibly I wouldn’t.

“Oh, yes, you will,” he rejoined blithely; “I think in a week, when we begin to bring in strike-breakers, there’ll be something really doing. You see,” he explained, “there’s no chance of coming to terms—I’ve given in and given in, and now they’re asking the impossible. And—well—I’m angry. That’s why I’m in such a good humor.”

I asked him if he wasn’t afraid of being himself so entirely unguarded. There seemed a somewhat sinister parallel between the position of his house and the town and the position of Paris and Versailles.

“You’re thinking that I’ll be another Marie Antoinette, are you?” he laughed. “Well, at all events, I won’t offer them cake alone. I’ve given them cake, and I’ve given them bread, and I’ve given them meat and silver forks to eat it with, and now”—he grew sombre—“I’ll give them nothing but fight.”

But the “following week” did not come, not for me at least; instead intervened a torrid and breathless Sunday. Little quivering heat waves

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lay across the country; the hills were misty blue; in the long avenue leading to the house the linden-trees seemed to hold back all the air that stirred. During the morning distant church-bells shivered into broken sound against what seemed a thick, incandescent, crystal globe surrounding one.

At four o'clock up the avenue came a queer, straggling, ominous group of men. Fifty or sixty of them, I suppose; and apparently they had been to a picnic, for they were carrying empty baskets. No doubt a good deal of the fiery liquid that makes Hungarian festivity had been drunken. Craig's butler saw them first and came running back to where we were sitting on the terrace of the formal garden behind the house.

"I'd just go away, Mr. Craig, sir," he said. "Let me talk to them until we can get some guards up from the mills."

Craig got up from his chair and stretched, and very carefully extinguished his cigarette. His face was suddenly extremely weary.

"Oh, no!" he said. "Certainly not. Go and telephone."

He watched the butler's retreating figure. "The damn pitiful loyalty of the hired man!" he commented. "That fellow would die for me, and I

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pay him eighty dollars a month. Coming? Don't follow me out onto the porch. It would do more harm than good."

"Why do you go at all?" I asked.

He swung around on me and for a moment his face blazed with sudden anger.

"Why not?" he questioned. "Do you think I'd run from a bunch of poor, miserable devils like these? Besides, if I talk to them maybe they'll go away. I don't want them shot. To shoot Hungarian working men in a cause like this would be just about as ignoble as shooting rabbits. While, as for men like you and myself, the one thing we do know in a confusing world is that, if any one is to be shot, we at least can prove that death is neither conquering nor indecent." Then he laughed, his good humor restored. "There won't be any shooting," he said. "This thing has got on my nerves. Come along!"

I followed him through the coolness of the long hall. Beyond I could hear a confused murmur of voices.

Craig threw open the door and stepped onto the porch, and for a moment surveyed the faces upturned to his.

"Well, my friends?" he asked.

A burly, sweating man in shirt-sleeves stepped

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forward. "Ve vant," he said, "to talk vit you—you yerselves."

"You have talked with me," said Craig; "your leaders, that is."

"No, ve!" returned the burly man. Suddenly he seemed to lose control of his studied calm; he swung his arms; his great face swelled and turned purple.

"You!" he roared. "You! You lif' up here in your cool house, and ve—my God!—there iss a man here whose childt died last night!"

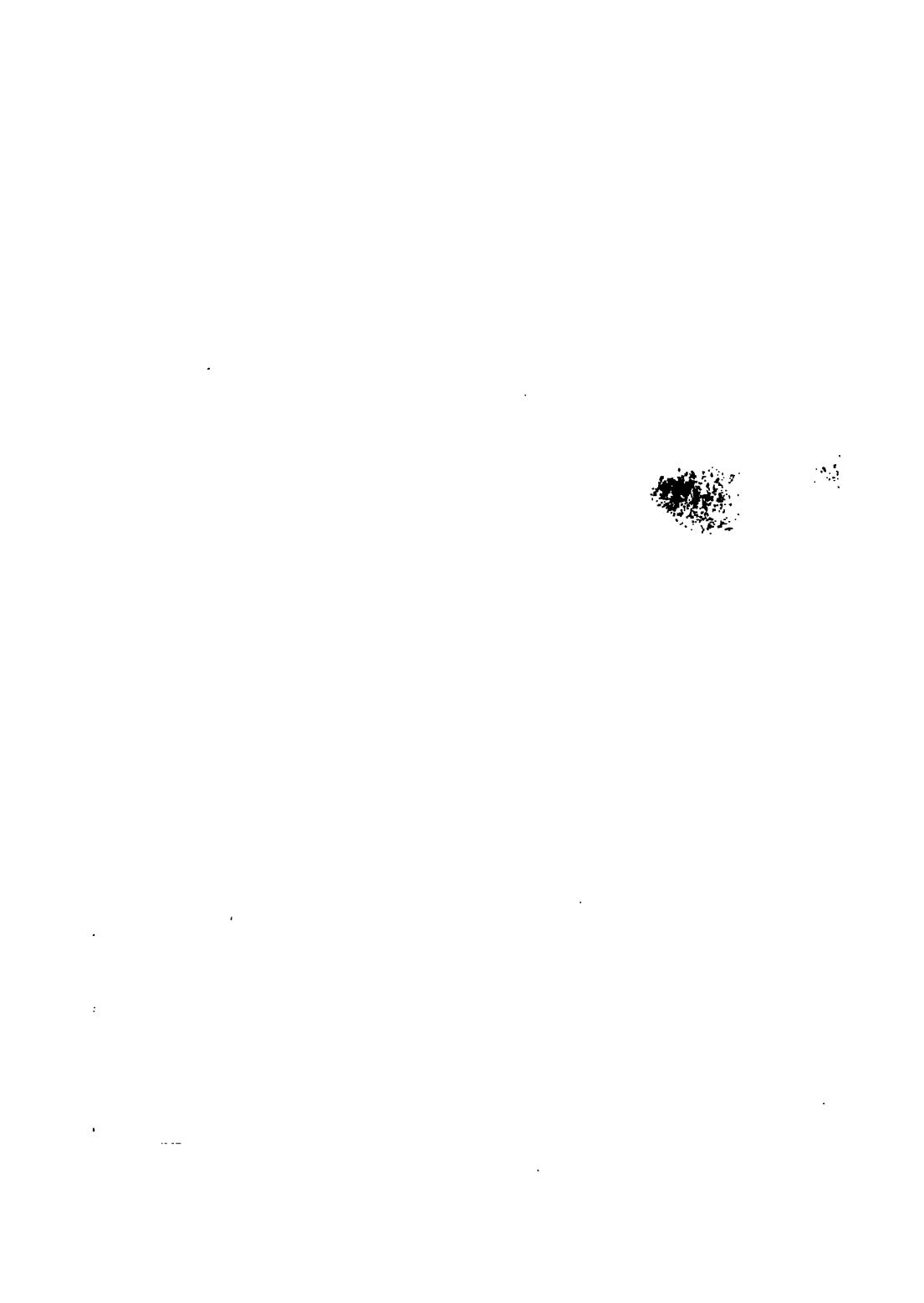
Craig threw back his head and made a great upward and downward gesture of weariness with his arm. "The same old thing!" he complained, as if to himself. "The same old thing! The utter lack of consequence of the world in general! What have I to do with that? There's not one of them that isn't living on the money I send them secretly."

And then the thing happened. I dare say it was Craig's gesture that snapped the cord of sanity. I saw a hand raised at the back of the crowd and sunlight glittering along the barrel of a revolver—a cheap, nickel-plated revolver. There was a spurt of flame and Craig caught at his breast, hesitated, and fell forward. The crowd turned and ran down the avenue. In the dis-

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tance I saw men hurrying toward us. I lifted Craig up. Suddenly he twisted his head from side to side as a man will who has reached the extreme limits of annoyance.

“How silly of them!” he said. “How damably silly! Oh, well”—his eyes smiled at me—“I put it through anyway, didn’t I?”



**THE GLORY OF THE WILD
GREEN EARTH**



THE GLORY OF THE WILD GREEN EARTH

ONE does forget, doesn't one, in this individualistic, egotistical age, the essential fact that the plans of the gods, no matter how upsetting they may seem at first, have continuity and in the end bring ultimate good? We are so impatient; we have become so little willing to abide the final happening. So it was that in the beginning I resented bitterly the scurvy trick fate had played on Mansfield Carston; so it was that in the beginning I resented with not much less bitterness that I should first have become cognizant of this trick during my one month of a long-anticipated holiday. Only recently, with increasing perspective, has a sense of method back of all this occurred to me; a realization that perhaps if I had not been on a holiday, had not come straight from a lonely country, where one's senses grow keener, the fine shades of the drama I witnessed might have been lost upon me. City dwellers apprehend things by their width; the dweller in lonely places apprehends them by their sharpness. Only recently, too, has it begun to dawn upon me

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that possibly, after all, Mansfield Carston has not lost everything; instead, that he may have gained much. Already, in actual production, in the painting of lovely pictures that will not be forgotten, he had accomplished greatly; whether he had accomplished patience, whether he had accomplished that fine inner sense of things without which in the end achievement to the person who achieves is but a crippled hawk, brooding dissatisfaction, I cannot say. I do not think he had. Has he learned by now? And if he has, is his personal gain commensurate with the loss to the world? These are difficult questions to answer. I shall go back again to the beginning. In the beginning . . .

When a man has been driving cattle in blizzards, or muffling his mouth against the yellow dust of summer days for an uninterrupted period of three years, there comes a time, no matter how much he may love his little cow-ponies, and gray expanses of sage-brush, and all the poignant moments of the country in which he lives, when he wants gayety, and plenty of it, gayety unshaken by the sterner facts of life. I had reached this point. For certain things I had been thirsting as a man thirsts for dusk in August; streets, for instance, with a veil of fog giving mystery to a

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thousand blinking electric signs; crowds, so that you hear the high, whispering accumulation of voices, feel the insistent elbows, smell the curious, sodden, inspiring smell of slightly damp, not very good clothes. And then, from all this, I wanted to come back to the unexpected quiet and aloofness of a club; to low-voiced, well-scrubbed servants; to a bed of cool sheets; to a morning of a valet and a porcelain tub and new and beautiful clothes. In short, I wanted to touch again for a while the thrilling magic of material comforts. And, particularly, I didn't want to think. I had been back a week; I was just settling down to a full enjoyment of the things I have described; life, meanwhile, with its incurable sardonicism, was taking not the least account of what I wanted or did not want. Out of the warm, tree-scented dusk of a May evening the sinister and the unexpected strolled in upon me. Its messenger, of all people in the world, was Pritchard—Pritchard, blond, bland, bred to the now archaic school that gentlemen should never show their feelings.

He—Pritchard—greeted me with the harmless condescension he practises; he placed one beautiful brown, begaitered boot on the foot-rail of the bar; in a disinterested voice he admitted a desire for a cocktail; in the same disinterested voice he

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informed me that the Carstons were back in New York, Mansfield Carston invalided from the trenches in Flanders, where, for the past two years, he had been. Fate seems to prefer for the conveying of its more tragic messages couriers with about them a touch of the futility of a Pritchard. For a moment the full significance of the information I had just received failed to come home to me; I was merely glad at the prospect of seeing, contrary to expectation, the Carstons so soon; merely greatly relieved that Mansfield Carston, with that brain of his so sensitive to beauty, those eyes with back of them so many pictures yet to be painted, was out of the hideous uncertainties of war. Inspiring as had been his sacrifice in enlisting, it had always seemed to me a sacrifice too great. Then, suddenly, a realization of the oddity of it all touched me. Although I saw them only at rare intervals, the Carstons were amongst the very best friends I had in New York; were amongst the few people whose movements I followed from my isolation in Wyoming. I had loved them both—and I use the much-abused word advisedly—ever since, ten years before, they had come, half without knowing why, to New York. I had watched them develop, from a shy, slim, gracefully awkward young Brit-

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ish painter of portraits, and a shy, slim, auburn-haired young wife, into the winged sort of people they now were: the direct, dexterous-minded man; the delicately resilient, mistily beautiful woman. These attributes of Alice Carston—this quality of delicate resilience, this quality of misty beauty—need bearing in mind, for in the eyes of most of her friends the latter attribute far outweighed the former. I had never thought so. She had always given me the impression of sunset across cornfields—strength, you perceive; brooding thought; and I had always been sure that it was she who had directed the somewhat errant stream of her impatient husband's nature into the broad channel of accomplishment. Women are constantly doing this: making little dams along leaky banks; pulling out of the way dangerous driftwood; very alert; persistently anxious; and men seldom know it.

Filaments of all these associated thoughts crossed my mind as I stared at Pritchard and the filaments grew into a definite perplexity. Why hadn't I known that the Carstons were back? Why hadn't I known that Mansfield Carston was wounded? Why had there been no mention of his return in the papers? Through all the anxiety that was hers, through all the difficulties

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that surround war-time mails, Alice Carston had, during her two years' stay in England, written me at intervals of a month. Her last letter had reached me only a couple of weeks before.

"They're not searching out their friends," said Pritchard.

I trust I am not given to premature apprehension—a middle-aged man in the cattle business shouldn't be—but at the moment a little, unexpected sense of oppression, of the untoward, blew upon me like a cold draft from a hidden crack. I do not like oppression, I do not like the untoward; I am averse to mystery. I attempted to corner Pritchard. It was curious to see embarrassment, hesitation, uncertainty struggle for possession of his careful, negative face. He pushed aside his glass; then he turned to me in sudden decision.

"I can tell you nothing," he said; "not a thing. I am as perplexed as you. I only know there is something hidden and out of the way, something beyond my experience. You see, I only saw the Carstons for a few minutes the other night, and"—he interrupted himself and stared vaguely at the wall opposite—"it happened to be fairly dark." I wondered what this had to do with what he was saying and why it was so carefully emphasized, but I had no time to question him,

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for he immediately proceeded; he proceeded, for Pritchard, with extreme volubility. I gathered that here were injured feelings. After all, he asked, he was one of the earliest and best friends the Carstons had, wasn't he? A little consideration was due him, wasn't it? Yes, just a little consideration. Hadn't he bought the first picture Mansfield Carston had ever sold in New York? Yes, that girl with the oranges. And now, here they were acting in a way he couldn't understand. Not a word to him of their being back; not a word. He had come across Alice Carston merely by chance in the street, and he had noticed right away an odd aloofness in her manner, an odd lack of cordiality, when he announced, as of course any one would have announced under the circumstances, his intention of calling at once.

"But I don't understand you," I insisted. "I don't know what you mean. Do you think there's something disgraceful?" I faced about on him. "What are you talking about, anyhow? Do you mean to imply that Carston isn't really wounded?"

There was a little minute of silence before Pritchard answered; when he did, he said an astonishing thing. "Yes," he said, "that's just

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it! I don't know whether he's wounded or not."

He allowed me a pause for this announcement to sink in. "That's just it," he continued; "just it! When you see a man sitting in a chair apparently as well as he's ever been, when he *talks* quite frankly about everything else in the world except what's the matter with him, but when, at the same time, from the moment you enter a room until you leave it, you are clearly aware of an atmosphere of reserve—reserve about real things, that is—and that on the part of two old friends whom you haven't seen for months, you wonder, that's all. You wonder, and you don't know."

He drew himself up. "I wouldn't talk this way," he observed, with a return to his old, muffled manner, "except to you and a few other of Mansfield Carston's friends. No, I wouldn't talk this way at all. I don't approve of conjecture, anyhow—and particularly about Mansfield Carston." He ate an olive apprehensively. "I've never met a man," he resumed, "so proud and so sensitive; have you? Never. No, I never met a man like him. And, do you know—it's queer, it's queer, but I've always had about him the feeling that if you were to say behind his back things he didn't like he'd know about it the next

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time you saw him.” He looked at me anxiously. “Did you ever feel that way?” he asked. “He’s—he’s the most pervading man I’ve ever met.” He wiped his mustache with a handkerchief of fine linen. “Going to dine here?” he concluded, with evident relief at the change of subject.

I shook my head. “No,” I said. “No.” As a matter of fact, it had been my intention to do so, but I felt that at the moment I could get along very well without further conversation with Pritchard. I wanted to think, and, although the Pritchards of the world may occasionally start one thinking, they seldom aid in the furtherance of the task.

Not far off was a small and fairly quiet hotel. I sought its down-stairs restaurant and chose a table in a corner. I proceeded to piece together what I had heard. It seemed to have no relation to fact. It was quite possible to imagine Mansfield Carston doing a foolish thing, but well-nigh impossible to imagine him doing a shameful one. A man who gives up a career, gives up a life it has taken him ten years to make, draws back from the very threshold of fame, submerges an impatient, shining individuality in the great anonymity of war, because of the adventitious gift of being born an Englishman, begins bravely,

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quixotically. A high degree of sensitiveness, of imagination, is necessary for such an act. And the highly imaginative man may be afraid—in fact, always is afraid—but he is more afraid of fear than of death. And Carston had gone on bravely. In Wyoming word had reached me of his promotion, of a second promotion, of a mention in despatches. I remember at the time trying to visualize him in his new, so strange surroundings; his thin, freshly colored face, with its shy, brown, humorous eyes—eyes that had in them that look of perspective instantly grasped the eyes of painters are so likely to have; his mouth, under its close-cropped black mustache; and particularly I saw his hands, those beautiful, proficient hands. I imagined them hanging, with their slim, strong wrists showing, from the sleeves of a tunic too short for him. He was excessively long-boned. Somehow, one thought of him most as peering out at night above barricades, wondering if here, or perhaps there, or perhaps over there, beauty was to be found amidst all the hideous litter of war. He would be sure to find beauty somewhere. And I remembered later on going into the house and finding there a magazine lately come and in it a poem. One stanza seemed peculiarly apt to the news I had just received.

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“For two things” [said the poem] “have altered not
Since ever the world began—
The glory of the wild green earth
And the bravery of man.”

The glory of the wild green earth—and the bravery of man! No, they had not altered—either of them. It was extraordinary—all these years; it was very heartening as well. It made a queer, splendid little shiver run across your shoulders; a fine, cold feeling touch your jaws.

Now, as I sat at my table in the restaurant, I recalled the poem and the thoughts it had given me. No, whatever it was that Carston was concealing, I felt sure that here was no ordinary secret of the wreck of war. The decision to see the Carstons—or to attempt to see them—grew in me. I have a theory that assistance, sincerely offered, no matter how much resented it may be at first, is in the end invariably welcome.

I paid my bill and went out into the street. In the main dining-room above the grill where I had been, the orchestra was playing a waltz. The windows, set with flowers in long boxes, were open, and the strains of the music drifted into the soft warmth of the spring night. The incredible wistfulness of waltzes struck me afresh. They are constantly reaching after a gayety their very real

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beauty prevents them ever from attaining. Life wants so much to be gay; and life has always to be satisfied instead with beauty, that antithesis of gayety. Suddenly I found myself laughing with rather dreary amusement at the way my holiday, so pleasantly begun, was beginning to end.

And yet the human mind is a confused affair. At first, when I arrived at the Carstons', I experienced distinct disappointment; felt greatly let down; a little bit silly. Everything seemed perfectly natural, perfectly ordinary, exactly what I remembered it to have been three years before. I don't know what I had been expecting; one never does know exactly what one expects when one has a sense of disaster; but to find apparent outward peace is disconcerting. That it is usual makes no difference. We cannot accustom ourselves, despite experience, to the persistent anti-climaxes of life. We hear of tragedy, but when we hurry to where it is we find, as a rule, existence going on much as usual; perhaps a red nose or two, that's all. We expect pomp and banners; we very seldom get them. Tragedy is as hidden as laughter is obvious.

The down-town side street, when I had come to the grilled-iron gate opening into the Carstons'

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garden, had been very quiet and dark. An Italian man servant, whom I remembered from my previous visits, had answered my ring and had asked me to wait outside, as the main part of the house was stripped for packing. The little garden, under a thick sky, heavy with stars, lay odorous and strangely remote from the encompassing city. There was a smell of grass, of flowering bushes; a glimmer of white stone benches. From a fountain at one end—I remembered it as the head of Pan, laughing—a trickle of water whispered like a hesitating voice. But in a minute or two Alice Carston had come down to me and had invited me up to the studio, and, although in the light of the hallway stairs I had studied her face, I could see about it nothing exceptional. Perhaps she was a trifle graver; perhaps she smiled more with her lips and less with her eyes. I could not tell; there were a good many shadows about.

“Mannie is not walking much as yet,” she said, “or he would have come down himself to welcome you. He will be so glad to see you.”

How silly of Pritchard! And how silly of me to allow myself to be disturbed by his vague imaginings! As if necessarily a man’s wounds would be where anybody could see and diagnose

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them! I found myself resenting Pritchard and the whole tribe of whispering, conjecturing, "social detectives." I laughed aloud, greatly, I am sure, to Alice Carston's astonishment. "How is his wound getting along?" I asked. "Where did he get it?"

I blamed my fancy that I imagined that there was a perceptible pause before she answered and that, as she turned toward me on the landing opposite the studio door, a veiling of her eyes, like a sudden wind over calm water, took place. She laid her hand on my arm; I thought her fingers unnecessarily tense.

"He—?" she said. "Oh, yes! He is much better, thanks. But don't mention it to him, please. Not a word of it." We opened the door and went in.

The odd, fascinating, bazaar-like smell of a place where men paint pictures met us. The room was mostly in shadow. In one corner, by a table on which stood a lamp with a crimson shade, Carston was sitting in a high-backed chair. His face and figure were indistinct.

"Here's Walter, Mannie," said his wife.

Carston did not get up. "Ah, my dear fellow!" he said. "My dear fellow! The one person in New York I really wanted to see! Come .

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here and shake hands with me. I can't quite come to you—but some day I'll be able to. Very soon, I hope. Alice, tell Emmanuel to bring some whiskey and biscuits."

I lit a cigarette and took one of Carston's big, enveloping chairs, a chair on the other side of the table from where he was sitting, one of the chairs with gorgeous, faded brocade covers I so well remembered. I looked about the room with warm satisfaction. It was nice to be back; to be back here again; to be again with these two dear people. I recalled a night, not so many weeks before, when I had snow-shoed from sundown to sun-up through the strangling cold of zero weather. That had been to westward; and eastward were all the scarred battlefields that Carston had so recently left. I smiled at Alice Carston as she sat down opposite me and picked up some needle-work. She smiled back.

I cannot tell when first I began to alter my impression of relief; when first began a return of the uneasiness, the anxiety of a short while before. Such a state of mind grows upon you imperceptibly; is the result of silences, gestures, indefinable mental attitudes. You come from entire unconsciousness to full-fledged certainty. Perhaps in this case it was Alice Carston's evident desire to

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avoid talking about the war; perhaps it was Carston's vagueness as to his future plans; perhaps it was—and here was the only definite thing I could lay hold of—the sudden, extraordinary, unlike-herself anger with which Alice Carston rebuked the servant when he placed the whiskey decanter and biscuits on the table near her husband and away from me.

"Never do that!" she commanded, a high, metallic quality in her voice. "I have told you before. Put the tray beside Mr. Harbison!"

In itself the speech was entirely unimportant and natural, but the tone that accompanied it was not in the least unimportant and natural when it fell on the ears of a person who knew Alice Carston and knew her gentleness and her definite philosophy of gentleness where inferiors were concerned. "One may, possibly, be harsh with the powerful," she had once told me, "but with the humble? Oh, no, never! That's dulling your own heart." And now, here she was doing this very same detested thing. There were only three possible explanations: either her nerves were bad, or she was angry, or she was frightened. The first, in view of her calmness, her clear, if somewhat thin, look of health, seemed preposterous; the remaining two had back of them

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certainly no obvious reasons. At all events, whatever the reason, my perplexity and discomfort increased. I felt myself even growing a little angry, as one does under circumstances of the kind where people with whom one is intimate are concerned. I objected to this sudden closing me out of their lives on the part of the Carstons. Friendship is too rare a thing for one to allow, without struggle, the curtain of misunderstanding to cut off frankness. And the curtain drops so readily. Pritchard had been right, after all. I finished my drink and stood up. This first visit should not be too long.

“Good-by,” I said, and held out my hand.

If you remember, I had been sitting in a chair on the other side of the table from Carston. Between us was the lamp with the crimson shade, and now, in order to reach him, I had to step a little to one side. I had expected him to remain where he was; I had fixed in my mind by now the idea that his wound prevented him from rising; but there must have been a temporary forgetfulness on his part, an accession of cordiality that for the time being obliterated caution, for he sprang to his feet without the slightest trace of infirmity and, the next moment, did an unbelievable thing—put out his hand, that is, and put it

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straight through the lamp that separated us. The gesture was direct; there was no fumbling, no weakness to account for it.

The lamp tottered and fell. I reached over and caught it. The light went out. In the darkness I heard Alice Carston cross to the electric switch, and instantly the room was again illuminated. When I looked around Carston was back once more in his chair, but not as he had been before, for his chin was sunk forward on his breast and—for now I could see it plainly—on his face was the look of a man who has just been struck a blow he cannot return. Only for a moment, however, did he sit this way, for the next he raised his head and shook it with an odd, defiant gesture. He laughed. "Rotten!" he said. "Can't be done, can it? I'm still too weak. Come and see us soon again, Wally." Perhaps if he hadn't laughed I would not have known what was wrong, but when people laugh their eyes—Carston, you understand, was blind.

During the few minutes that followed I acted automatically. I heard my voice, calm, controlled, but as if belonging to another person, bidding the Carstons good-by, and suggesting that I come to see them soon again, and I heard Carston answering: "Yes, come at night. That's

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better. I'm not painting as yet, y' see, but I've a lot of letters to attend to, and this packing up takes my days. Yes, come at night." And then I found myself out on the landing, the studio door closed behind me, and Alice Carston facing me, one hand on her breast.

"So you know!" she whispered.

"Yes," I answered. "I know."

After that we looked at each other for a while without speaking, then her arm dropped wearily to her side, where her fingers began to twist between them a fold of her skirt.

"I suppose you understand," she asked. "If you don't—"

"Not quite. Perhaps—in a way. It isn't altogether clear."

She raised her head and came closer to me, and her voice had in it the curious, dry, strained note that voices have when they have choked too much over tears. "It's so simple," she said, "if you remember what he is—how proud and unbeatable. He's always looked on life as some fine, laughing adventure; something to be surmounted—and now!" She drew herself up and her eyes widened and grew starry. "He's still fighting, you see, but he's fighting so horribly in the dark. And for a while, at least, he must not

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know that any one is helping him—no, not even I."

She searched my face. "He's never met fate before," she continued, "when it was implacable, and he doesn't know how, you understand—doesn't know how to meet it. He has been so used to bending life entirely to his own design. If it was anything else but his eyes—but his eyes are what made the whole world for him. You don't wonder, do you, that as yet he won't admit it; won't admit defeat? Some day, of course, but now—" It was as if she was pleading with me to understand Carston.

"No," I said. "I don't wonder."

I left her standing where she was, her eyes thoughtful and fixed on the shadows in front of her.

The little garden, as I passed through it again, seemed even more sibilant than before, filled with a score of whispering, confused voices. Then I went back to my club; my holiday was over.

Friendship is one of the liabilities with which we complicate an already over-complicated existence. The man who is busy with his affections is very busy indeed. Selfish burdens are comparatively easy to bear; it is only when we see a friend

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encompassed and cannot render him aid that we reach that folly of despair where life seems to us a stupid matter of an unfair giant striking little people into the dust. I reached that point several times during the next two weeks. I walked constantly with dissatisfaction as a companion. The thought of Carston followed me wherever I went, obtruding itself into whatever I did, and always I saw him as I had seen him that moment after the lamp had been upset, sitting wearily back in his chair, a look on his face as if he had been struck a blow he could not return. Sometimes the apparent idiocy of the thing changed dull dissatisfaction into rage. Why, with a hundred million eyes to be put out, should two eyes filled with beauty be blinded? I continued to go to the Carstons' studio frequently, although I made my visits short, for I was torn between a desire to be of help and the knowledge that, just at the moment anyhow, my presence was not altogether a source of pleasure. Now that I knew Carston's secret, however, it was not difficult to pretend that I didn't. Our talk limped along like a gay and desperate cripple. And then, quite suddenly, I realized, what I should have realized long before, realized, that is, that my discovery on the fateful night in question, far from being a

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climax, was merely an incident in the drama I was witnessing.

Underneath Alice Carston's quiet, underneath Mansfield Carston's somewhat feverish cheerfulness, were hidden matters the presence of which I was just beginning to perceive. I began to perceive a grim, unrelenting struggle of wills; I began to perceive a vigilance; I began to perceive—how does one describe the intangible, the indescribable without making it too definite; without making it appear as if one had seen it clearly and not, as is always the case, dimly?—an atmosphere of expectancy. All very vague, you understand; nothing I could lay my finger on. Openly the Carstons were going forward placidly with their plans for leaving New York; but covertly there was, for instance, the curious way Alice Carston watched her husband when she thought I was not looking, and there was, for instance, the curious feeling you had when you entered the studio, as if you had interrupted a discussion—a silent discussion, a discussion between mind and mind; a discussion in which not a word was spoken. There were many other curious things as well: for one, the manner with which Alice Carston, with cleverness, with sophistry, prevented the conversation ever from taking the turn of easy cynicism, of the

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lively descent to a despairing *reductio ad absurdum* that conversation between Carston and myself had been in the habit of taking. It had always been our delight to prove buoyantly the ultimate worthlessness of life, the ultimate folly of mankind, knowing all the while, of course, that neither of us thought anything of the kind. And Alice Carston had invariably made an excellent third. Unlike most women, she appreciated the mental exercise of argument for argument's sake. But now she was quite different, oddly different; she discouraged any opening along such lines; she was immensely practical and to the point and healthily matter-of-fact. But perhaps all this would have gone unnoticed on my part, or at the most would have been assigned by me to the ordinary solicitude under the circumstances, had it not been for the incident of the automatic pistol. It was a disturbing incident; yet there is not much to tell about it.

The pistol had lain on the centre-table of the studio ever since the night of my first visit. I had noticed it frequently—a big, blunted thing, brutal as modern war. One evening I picked it up casually and took out the chamber. The top cartridge fell into my hand. I started to replace it, when its shape attracted my attention.

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"Why—" I began; and then I knew, in the unexplainable way in which you do know such things, that Alice Carston was staring at me. I raised my head. Her hand was extended and as I looked she brought her finger up to her lips. On her face was a look of terror. "Why," I continued, "this is something I never saw before—This gun of yours," I hurriedly added. "It's the one you used in France, isn't it?"

Carston laughed. "Yes," he said. "Ugly, isn't it?"

"Very ugly," I agreed.

I was not surprised when the next morning I received a note from Alice Carston. "I must thank you," she said, "for your quickness of mind last night. Indeed, I can never thank you enough for all you have done—or, rather, for all you have been kind enough and wise enough not to do; for your consideration in not asking questions; for your consideration in waiting, as I have had to do, in patience. My very dear friend, I wonder if you will ever know how you have helped me? Yes, the cartridges were blank, as you perceived. But I wonder if you also perceive why I cannot merely put—somehow I cannot bear to give it its name—put 'the thing' where it will be safe? I feel now that, wherever possible, expla-

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nations are due you. You see, I must leave it there—leave it where he knows it is. If I hid it he would realize my reason for so doing; would realize that I am afraid; and he must never realize that; never realize it for a moment. But I can't be with him every minute of the day, and so—you understand now, don't you?"

Yes, I understood, and, from now on, I, too, watched. I fell into the habit of going frequently to the Carstons' instead of for only a few minutes in the evening; I fell into the habit of staying there a long while. Alice Carston accepted this gratefully. To Carston I confessed loneliness and boredom and a desire to read. I do not see how he imagined that I suspected nothing of his pitiful, so easily detected secret; I do not know what he thought must be going on in my mind about the hours he spent by the open window, staring—apparently staring—down into the by now gay verdure of the garden. But men fighting shadows, men with fixed ideas, overlook the obvious, imagine a world as they themselves insist upon its being.

The little garden was catching up with June. The flowering bushes had shed their blossoms and were taking on the thick greenness of summer. Against the wall espaliered roses of red and white

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were beginning to show. There was a drowsy sunshine, in which the fountain trickled pleasantly and a few bees, deceiving themselves as to their whereabouts, hummed sleepily. At the window, all day long, sat Carston.

I wondered how long this would last. The sense of impending catastrophe sharpened, overlaid my entire life, as gradually the portentous heat of the last few days was beginning to overlay the sparkling warmth of spring. But I needn't have wondered. The human mind is like a cup; it can hold, before it overflows, only so much. There is no other question, except whether the cup is filled drop by drop or hastily. The cup that Carston was holding was filling slowly, as the cups of all brave men do. But there came an end. It came on a hot and stifling night, a night when, if cups are almost full, there is likely to be a sudden further pouring into them of enough to make the hands that hold them tremble.

I had dined in the coolness of my club—a cruelly detached coolness—and afterward the heavy, forboding quality of the streets impressed me. The city was stirring to its months of fever. Perhaps I exaggerate; perhaps I am using retrospection. I don't know; at all events, I do know

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that I was even more depressed than usual when I came to the Carstons' garden gate. The Italian man servant let me pass without question—lately I had fallen into the habit of going up to the studio unannounced—and so I came unaccompanied to the door on the third-story landing. It was partly open. I don't know why I did not knock; I can claim no prescience here, merely carelessness; and at first when I entered the room I was sorry I had not knocked, then I was very glad.

There was hardly any light at all; the lamp had been turned so low as merely to accentuate the shadows. Across from me I made out the wide window, a square of purple darkness in the surrounding black. In front of the window were Mansfield Carston and his wife; their figures therefore were a trifle clearer to me than otherwise they would have been. They had not heard me come in; they did not even notice the shaft of light that followed me from the hall. They must have been very intent upon their own business, for this lack of observation did not come because of the sound of their own talk; they were not talking at all; they were perfectly silent. Something made me stop where I was. In the long pause that followed, the oppressiveness of the

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night, the oppressiveness of my thoughts seemed to concentrate in the room; the shadows seemed to be assuming the ponderosity of material objects. Then Mansfield Carston spoke. His voice, except for a touch of dryness, a touch of strain about it, was perfectly natural; there was even a hint of a deprecatory laugh in its smooth accents. Perhaps you will not agree with me, but at the time the natural voice, the hint of a deprecatory laugh, struck me as peculiarly horrible.

“How extremely silly!” said the voice. “How very silly of you!”

There was no answer and the voice went on in the same slightly careless way. “You might have got hurt, you know. I might have shot you and not myself; and then what would have happened? I would have had worse to add to the damn things I’ve got already.”

The voice hesitated, and for an instant the shadows once more grew heavy; then the voice sent them back again where they belonged. “Will you tell me,” it asked—and there was a new touch of desperation in the words—“why you stopped me? What do you propose that I shall do? Do you want me to go on living in the way I’ve been doing?”

Still Alice Carston did not answer. The effect

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was curious, uncanny, like that of a man talking to himself in the darkness.

“Tell me!” insisted Carston. “Do you?” He didn’t raise his voice; he was very gentle.

But the gentleness was too much for Alice Carston, as I had known it would be. I saw her make a sudden movement.

“Don’t!” she begged. “Don’t! I can’t bear it!”

“I am very sorry,” said her husband, “but what am I to do? If it had been anything else but my eyes— Now it’s all gone, you see—all the things I lived for. Why, I can’t even get up in the morning and look about me. And I have tried—tried to get another point of view; but it’s no good. Not a bit of good.” He paused again. “I’m tired,” he concluded.

You cannot imagine the queerness of this; of this reasonable, calm, incredible discussion. I felt a wave of hopelessness overwhelm me. When a man talks in this fashion what can one do with him? Alice Carston had for the time being prevented the irrevocable, but what of the moments to follow? Here was no sudden impulse, no desperate instant, but a slowly achieved determination. And then—as suddenly, as swiftly, as before, slowly and with stolid oppressiveness, the

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shadows had advanced upon me, there seemed to advance into the room a new presence—a spirit, so strong, so intent, that one felt it a bodily shape—a figure keen as flame, with white wings folded—if one should have to visualize it—and with hands gripping, until the flesh bit into the hilt, the sword they held. I shrank back still farther into the shadows. I had never before, you understand, seen a woman or, for that matter, a man—play, with every atom of strength possessed, for the life of some one she or he loved.

Alice Carston moved toward her husband. “Come here,” she said, and her voice trembled. “Are your eyes all you have to live for?”

He faltered. “Yes,” he said, like a sullen child.

“And I?”

“Well, yes——” ,

“No, answer me! And I?”

“Yes, but what good am I to you now?”

“What good?—oh, my dear! My dear!”

I heard a sudden tearing of lace, or silk, and I saw that by now the two figures by the window were indistinguishable. “There!” said Alice Carston. “See, I have torn my sleeve! There is my arm. Can you touch it? That is my arm!” There was a little silence. “Do you know what it means, my arm—all of me?”

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“Yes.”

“No! No, you don’t know what it means. No, you nor any other man. No, you don’t know what it means, or you would never think again of what I just now stopped you from doing. No, you don’t know what it means. Listen! It is flesh of your flesh, blood of your blood; you have taken it into yourself as if you had been my child, only more, more, for I have taken you into myself as well. And if you die it dies, too, even if it still seems to go on living. Yes, all of me—all the body you’ve loved and the heart you’ve lain against.”

“Don’t!” said Carston.

“Don’t?” She broke into a harsh little laugh. “Why not? Do you think I want you to murder me?”

Suddenly her voice grew caressing. “Put your hand here,” she said, “and here. Do you know what you’re doing? That is I—I! And you’ve made me—you’ve made me! Oh, yes, infinitely more than even a mother can make her child.” She waited a moment. “Do you understand?” she asked.

“Yes,” said Carston slowly and wonderingly.

“I am not changed—nor the world. Listen!”
In the silence the hum of the city, the thrilling

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nearness of human life that on warm nights pours through open windows, surrounded us.

“Will you kiss me?” said Alice Carston.

After a while I saw Carston’s figure draw back toward the window, and I made out that he was leaning upon the sill. In a moment or so he spoke.

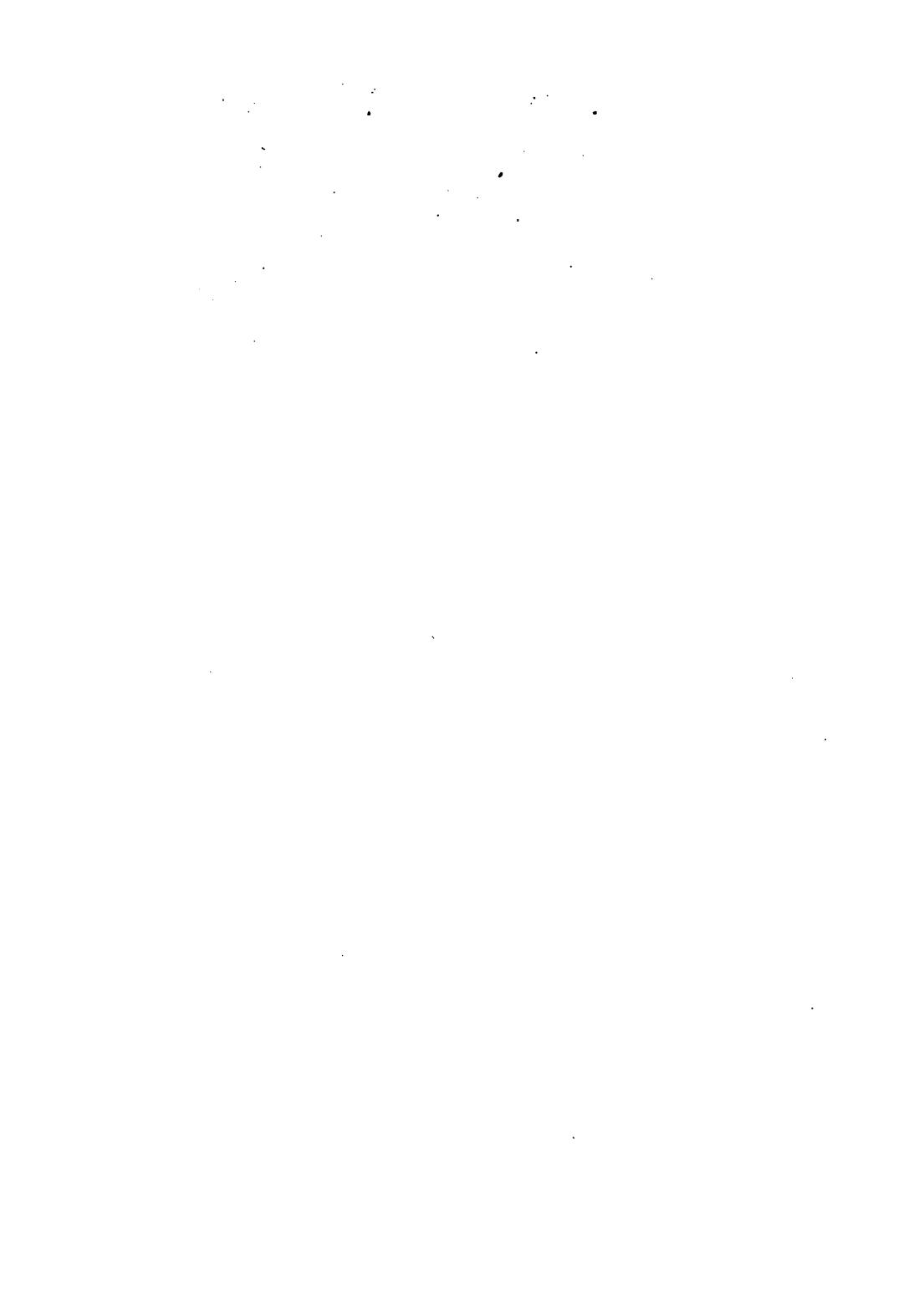
“Yes,” he said, “it is foolish, isn’t it? It’s always foolish to run away from things. And, after all, there’s so much left—yes, why not?” When he spoke again there was a little catch in his voice. “I can smell those roses,” he said, “and here I’ve been sitting for two weeks and never knew they were in bloom.”

Suddenly he stepped back, reeled, and fell on his knees. His voice reached me, muffled, as if he had hidden his face in the folds of his wife’s skirt.

“Oh, my dear! My dear!” he said. “Thank God I can cry now and not be ashamed!”

I left as unnoticed as I had come. I shouldn’t have been there at all; but I am very glad I was.

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